

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wing, but you would not.”

Can you parents can empathize with this passage? I bet those of you with especially rebellious children definitely can. Who have offered their hands, their house, their wallet, their time, prayers, and energy. Yet there is no return on the investment, there is no guarantee that they will receive the free care you offer—how ridiculous of them!?

How stupid could they be, to turn away such care!?! How dumb could the Israelites be? They knew how God worked, speaking His Word through His messengers, His prophets. God speaks for their good, even if it sounds bad at the time—that’s just to bring them back to Him! Yet like in Jeremiah’s time, so in Jesus’; they loved hearing God’s word when it simply affirmed them as the perfect ones, His chosen nation; as soon as Word came to them that they weren’t quite so perfect, they presume that the speaker is wishing ill upon them, rather than conveying the real disapproval of the true God, His lack of affirmation of their selfish, sinful ways.

In such an anthropocentric time, when mankind can overcome essentially any problem, the same issue arises today—we like hearing God’s word when it approves of us, or even comes across as a little fix. God might charge us with this sin or that. “Sure, I choose to sin in this case, but I could get over that. With a little correction I can get going on the road to being my best self.” Preaching that betters you goes over really well because being a “good person” is in vogue right now—it’s a good Instagram aesthetic to care about your family and community—it gets a lot of likes.

But to hear that this, that this problem we have in life isn’t a little fix, that it’s not ten easy steps to loving better, eating healthier, being more righteous means that it’s further from our grasp than we thought. Really, we hear that it’s unattainable, as Jesus comes out and says, repeating the same message of the prophets: stop caring about yourself and simply, out of faith in God’s care, care for your neighbour, and trust, love, and worship God above all else—repent and be forgiven. At this proclamation Jesus receives the ire, the rage of the religious around him. Their system wasn’t enough. They’d have to let it, and themselves with their pride and works, die.

This man is preaching against His own people, against God's own people, and therefore He deserves to die. It would be like an oiler's fan getting outraged by someone saying that maybe they should change a few things up and stop sucking so much. The outraged fan goes so far as to kill the critic, all for saying the truth, the truth which could ultimately save them—next year.

Like a parent doing what ever it takes to set their child on the path to success—telling a child to smarten up, sitting with the child to hear what they're going through, bringing in mentors to help out, paying for therapy, going on trips, and so much more, all for the sake of getting the kid to pay attention in school and learn how to respect the authority placed over them in order that they can grow up, learn, and participate and excel in society, only to have the child sit back and pout and rebel and act out.

It seemed as though nothing God did could keep them focussed and listening, listening to the very things that would ensure them a long life in the promised land. No amount of guidance or bread from the sky or water from a rock, no amount of forgiveness provided through sacrifice and love demonstrated could keep them from straying from His care. They might stay for a generation but then things would waver and crash with their kids or grandkids.

But really, the same thing happens today. Grandma was a faithful Christian. All her kids were baptized. Of that generation half still attend church—all the grandkids were likely baptized and maybe even confirmed. But 5 of 30 attend church. Who knows what the next generation will look like? Some will be baptized in infancy. Others will hear the Gospel later on in life. Unfortunately others in the family will never trust in Christ.

Faith doesn't look as clean as we would like, with faithful generation after faithful generation, with the good kids staying in the church as they should because they listen to their parents, while maybe the rotten children fall away. Sometimes it's the trouble makers that grace makes the most sense to, that it means the most, while the good kids have no need for it. Sometimes it's the other way—it really is entirely unpredictable. What we do know is that God loves them all—He hasn't rejected a single one, but yearns to gather them all under His wings alongside Jerusalem.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how do we make sure that we aren't like Jerusalem, who had received the favour of God and chose to throw it away because His Word of salvation offended them?

Well, first, above all, we must recognize that we are like Jerusalem. There is nothing better in us that holds onto grace any tighter, with any stronger faith. There is nothing better about us than our neighbour who used to attend church 5 years ago but now is a devout agnostic, determinately undecided about anything. Acknowledging that that could just as easily be us is the first step in staying here, held by God and nurtured by His grace. We must recognize that, like our salvation, our preservation in the faith is by grace alone.

The second step, now that we've stopped looking at any lists of tips and tricks to keep us close by our own merit, is to look at Christ, the source of all grace.

Last week He went head to head with the devil and withstood by only the Word of God. It was the power by which Christ's will stood strong, even in the midst of famine and even while looking straight at the suffering on the cross He would have to endure in order to accomplish His mission. This week He faces another opponent, and honestly, one much less formidable. Herod apparently wants Christ dead. Whoopdidoo. Much less terrifying than the devil himself, Christ simply says 'tell the old guy "I'm going to carry on. The threats he would utter are not going to deter me from my ultimate goal. I will continue casting out demons and healing the sick; I am going to continually bring about my kingdom until the third day when all will be accomplished."'"

Really, if anything was going to deter Christ, it would be the climax of His mission itself, the very road He had to walk. Herod wasn't going to lay a hand on Christ if it wasn't God's will; neither could the crowds which sought to push Him off a cliff do any harm. The winds and waves would not be the end of Christ because the time had not yet come. Only when the hour finally arrived, when the dominoes were knocked over and the end immanent, when the moment that was necessary was finally at hand would Christ's mortality come to be fully known. And He knew that this was His end.

Yet not even that deterred Him; not even enduring the entire wrath of God on behalf of every person who had and would ever exist turned Christ away. Not even enduring total separation from the

Father changed His course. This end made Him sweat blood; something causing me that much fear would make me hesitate, but not Christ. “Not my will, but Yours be done,” He says.

It was necessary, that on that day, in that hour, He would be killed in Jerusalem at the request of those He came to save. Those whom He wished to gather under His wings and give His care, in this time and in all times when He spoke His Word through His prophets. He yearned to gather them in to safety, yet they sought to kill Him, true to the city’s character.

The Word became flesh and dwelled among us; He came to His own, but His own received Him not. They rejected Him, despised Him, and hung Him on the cross to die.

Jerusalem took the life of another victim, and indeed innocent blood was upon them, as Jeremiah prophesied. But it was not upon them to bring judgment as they deserved but to forgive them and care for them, as the blood, the life, of Christ, living or dead, had always sought. Their rejection had not spurned God on to judge them and exile them as it had in the past; this time, the blood they shed was that of the paschal lamb, of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World; even the sin of Jerusalem

And news of this would continue to be proclaimed to them, God spreading His wing over them again and again and again. Christ’s resurrection would be proclaimed and forgiveness for even this heinous sin would be given. If they perished, it was not because the olive branch was not offered. The gift was in their midst, the forgiving blood walking and talking among them. If salvation was not among any of them, it was not because Christ had not poured it over them, but because they threw it away or side-stepped it.

And the same rings true in every age, among all peoples of the earth among whom the Gospel has been proclaimed. None are out of reach, none need to do anything to receive His gift. So if they reject it is not because they didn’t work enough or weren’t good enough to receive God’s love—those aren’t the requirements. If they reject His gift it is because of purely that. They threw it away and ran the other way. As is the possibility for each and every one of us, lest we ever get proud and think we’ve got this staying-faithful thing down pat; Tomorrow that could be us, Lord, have mercy.

Yet no matter our level of faithfulness, He remains faithful. On the days when we stand strong in the Faith, on days when we waiver and express doubts, and on days when we are sure that God doesn't exist or He certainly doesn't love me, He does not abandon us. It is not that He turns His grace from us, but we are spurning it, but not even for that, not on the thousandth time does He stop loving us. He chases, He works, He plans. If Herod's death threats couldn't cause Jesus to turn around, if Satan's temptations couldn't bring Him to a change of mind, if Jesus was so set on bringing salvation to this World by His agonizing death, you can be sure that He is not going to give up on bringing salvation to His beloved today.

So on days of doubt as on days of faith, may this bring you hope. Cling to His persistence, and know that He is not giving up on you. Today alone He goes to lengths to remind you at least 3 times that your sins are wiped away, His righteousness given to you, your death defeated and His life promised to you.

And for those of you who cry out like Jesus, weeping over those who have spurned His protective wing, know that He remains chasing them. He has placed many Christians, including you, in their lives in order to bring them back—to show them His love countless times over for each time they reject Him. So pray. Be there for them. And trust in the God who has already paid the price; He's gone to all lengths to save all, even those who like us, reject Him. He has not forgotten them, but yearns to gather them under His wings, just as He has done for us today and has promised to do so forever.

Amen.