

Temple To Fall And Bracing For Hard Times

November 2019

Luke 21.5-18

Jesus Foretells Destruction of the Temple

⁵ And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, ⁶“As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” ⁷ And they asked him, “Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?” ⁸ And he said, “See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and, ‘The time is at hand!’ Do not go after them. ⁹ And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”

Jesus Foretells Wars and Persecution

¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish. ¹⁹ By your endurance you will gain your lives.

Message

Tough Messages Near The End

Intro:

In September I got to walk around the raised foundation platform of the Temple that Jesus visited.

We are talking about a raised stone platform of 14.5 hectares. Jesus visited the Temple that was here several times in his life-time. The last time was leading up to his death on the cross just outside the city walls.



Before I say any more about what was the physical temple on this site I need to bring you into an open secret. It's something Jesus spoke about but no one understood then and many still do not today. The secret is this: Jesus had come to replace the Temple.



From the time of Moses there had been a designated place to worship where God agreed to be present. First it was the Tabernacle which stood for 400 years at a place named 'Shilo'.

This tent-like structure designed for the wilderness was succeeded by the Jerusalem Temple of Solomon finished in 957 BC which stood until the Babylonians destroyed it in 586 BC.

A second temple was built from 538 BC onwards when the exiles returned but was not as grand and impressive as what Solomon's Temple had been. This loss of quality was always felt. So a generation before Jesus from about 15 BC, Herod the Great set himself to make the Second Temple splendid. For 46 years Herod and the Jews threw everything into it.



By the time Jesus and his friends from Galilee arrived it was magnificent beyond all telling and as good as it was going to be. Anyone coming to Jerusalem would see the gold ridges and structures of the Temple from a distance before coming close to see stunning art installations and decorations.

Like the disciples of Jesus I came to what was left of Herod's Temple and was captivated by the stones of the foundation. They are very big and very impressive. The biggest stone near the base of the Western Wall is 12.2 meters long, 3.6 meters high and 4.3 meters deep weighing an estimated 500 tonnes or more.



Temple
Stones

The astounding claim of Jesus is that he presented himself as the replacement of this glorious meeting place with God.

The conversation in John 2.19-20 sets it out clearly but who could understand it? Jesus said to the learned leaders and authorities:

¹⁹ "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

This is the clue that made sense after the resurrection.

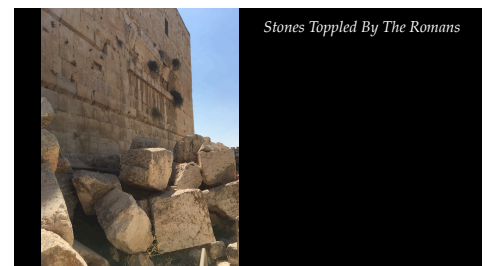
Jesus came to replace the temple and that made him very dangerous to those invested in the ongoing power, religion and business of the Temple.

Jesus claimed he would replace the function of the temple as the place where God and humanity met, where sin was atoned for, where God was present among humans.

Jesus prophesied that the temple with all its impressive stones and grandeur would be destroyed – within a generation. Less than 40 years after his death his words were fulfilled:

⁶ "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

When the Jews revolted against Rome in 66 AD it resulted four years later in 70 AD in the Temple being destroyed. To make the destruction total the Romans set to toppling every stone they could move from the Temple Mount. Many of those stones are still lying exactly where they fell as a testimony to this traumatic event in Jewish history.



Stones Toppled By The Romans

Interpretation

Jesus was speaking about the time of the next generation in which he would replace the Jerusalem Temple and it would be destroyed.

In the lead up to that horrendous event there would be many signs, upheavals and much turbulence. Into that Jesus gave some specific teaching.

At the same time this is also teaching for the next time of tribulation before Jesus' returns. Today we are also living in a space of prophetic prediction and hope. This world -as it is- is not our home. Jesus will return when his bride has been purified by fires of persecution.

The instruction Jesus set out for his generation at the time of the Temple's destruction apply to us in this time before his return too.

What does he say?

First, that we should not be unduly perturbed by what seems to us to be catastrophic political upheavals. The Jewish War of Revolt and the destruction of the temple were absolutely catastrophic for the Jewish nation, and Jewish followers of Jesus. And yet Jesus is quite explicit: even such a catastrophic event does not shake or undermine the purposes of God.

Secondly, in uncertain times Jesus' followers are bound to face opposition. When things are being shaken, people feel insecure, and they are quick to find scapegoats and make minority groups objects of vilification. We should not be surprised.

Thirdly, this is a time for testimony. It is a time to be rooted with confidence in the good news of Jesus, and to trust the Spirit of God that he will guide and direct us in speech and action.

Fourthly, this is a time to be rooted in the teaching of Jesus, and not to be blown off course by various teachings claiming to be from him, but in fact misleading us away from the gospel.

Fifthly, this will be a time of division, even division within households. After all, Jesus was clear that, in an important sense, he came to 'bring division and a sword'.

Sixthly, the primary quality for Jesus' followers is 'endurance to the end.'

6 Instructions

1. Do not be unduly perturbed by political upheavals.
2. Do not be surprised by opposition.
3. This is a time for testimony so be rooted with confidence in the good news of Jesus, trust the Spirit of God that he will guide and direct us in speech and action.

6 Instructions

4. This is a time to be rooted in the teaching of Jesus, and not to be blown off course by various teachings claiming to be from him, leading us away from the gospel.
5. This will be a time of division, even within households.
6. The primary issue is 'endurance to the end.'

We might be living in a different moment from those Jesus was speaking to in Jerusalem, but many of the lessons are ones we need to hold on to until Jesus returns.

Conclusion:

Jerusalem and its Temple fell as Jesus predicted, within a generation, largely because the city did not recognize God's purposes in Jesus when he came.

That remains the all important priority for us: to recognize and honour God's purposes in Jesus no matter what distressing signs and disasters will take place. That is to be our point of focus over what breaks out around us.