

INI

A few Sundays back, Jesus warned us of wolves in Sheep's clothing.
Today, we talk about something similar.
Instead of false teachers and teachings disregarding God's Word,
Jesus teaches about false senses of religious security.

Satan works hard in the church to draw us away from faith in Christ.
His tactics are tricky.
He convinces us of half-truths, loosely based on God's Word,
Yet leaves out the whole truth.
Satan will try to convince you to idolize things that surround God,
But not actually God Himself.

He certainly convinced the Old Testament Church.

Jerusalem was the holy, chosen city of God.
It's history dated back to Abraham in Genesis 12.
It was the capital of God's Promised land throughout His people's history,
Despite the numerous evil kings who reigned there.
But we also have righteous kings, like King David, who reigned there.

Most importantly, Jerusalem had the Temple -
The place where God met man -
The place where sacrifices were made -
The place where atonement and peace between God and man was made.
Since Jerusalem had the Temple, a special place of God's favor,
They felt indestructible.
But then, the Temple became their idol.

We see evidence of that in our Old Testament reading.
Jeremiah 7:4 says that they trusted in these words: **"This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord"**
They trusted in the Temple instead of God Himself,
But only through faith in God,
Is anyone to be counted as righteous,
just as it was for Abraham in Genesis 15:6.

They had false worship - they claimed forgiveness without repentance.
They claimed deliverance from sin, but subjected themselves back to the slavery of sin by willingly wallowing in it.

Their sinful flesh, pride, and lack of listening to God's commands and promises,
Was Satan's tool in luring God's people into a false sense of security.
Satan led them to idolize the Temple,
While rejecting God with their daily living.

Certainly this prophetic warning extends to us -
Don't let Satan convince you of half-truths.
Drink deeply the knowledge of God,
Through which God places His armor upon you.
He equips you with His Word, righteousness, peace, truth, and faith.
Don't let Satan convince you that coming to church wipes the slate clean,
Preparing you for a week full of sinning.
That's idolizing the Church, dwelling in a false sense of security,
Instead of fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things.

Jerusalem in the Gospel lesson is much the same as in the Old Testament.
In between these two time periods, Israel has gone through the Exile,
When they were taken from the promised land by the Babylonians.
Once they were able to return to their land,
They strictly kept God's commands, lest something like the exile happen again.

But the Temple is still there.
And you'd expect Jerusalem, meaning "the city of peace",
To be the poster boy of God's presence on earth.

But from the Gospel, we see Jesus wept over the city.
It's hard to imagine God weeping -
but God does weep since He became flesh.

What caused Jesus to weep?
Certainly, those who sold in the Temple were in issue.
They sold animals, wheat, and so on to be used for sacrifice,
Which is perfectly fine.
But the problem was that only temple money could be used to buy those things,
So people had to exchange Roman money for Temple money.
The exchange rate was high,
And enormous amounts of money were made by the Temple exchange rates.
As a result, the poor were taken advantage of for greedy gain.
Hence, Jesus judges them to have made the Temple into a den of robbers.

But that was only an indication to a much darker reality –
That these people were faithless.

And that's really what made Jesus weep –
The faithlessness of God's chosen people.
Jesus knew that they would reject Him, thus rejecting God.
He knew that they've taken false comfort in THEIR obedience to God's law,
And will ignore Him as the Messiah who frees His people from their sins.

The people thought they had the visitation from God in the Temple,
Which they certainly did.
But they didn't have faith to see the promised Messianic visitation,
When God became man.
Thus, Jesus pronounced judgment on the city,
Which will come to fruition 40 years later in 70 AD,
when the Romans crumbled the entire city, including the Temple.

If Jesus wept over this holy city,
It isn't unthinkable that God could pronounce judgment on the church, or weep
over the church.
Because if the church, the bride of Christ,
begins to think she is intrinsically holy and dignified
because of who and what she is,
we are no different from Jerusalem.
If the Church forgets that Christ uses grace, forgiveness, and mercy
to make His bride holy,
then we're no different from the temple folks.

But maybe the pendulum has swung the other way –
Instead of taking false comfort in our enacting of God's Law,
Maybe our sin is that we've taken false comfort in a misunderstanding of the
Gospel –
That God doesn't care what we do or don't do.
What we believe or don't believe.
That we can come to church for an hour a week,
And live however I darn well please the other days of the week,
Not being shaped by what's received at church.
The Gospel forgives us, but also enables us to live holy lives through Christ who
lives in us.

Jerusalem wasn't prepared for Christ's visitation.
That resulted in their judgment.
Are you ready for Christ's second visitation?
When Christ comes to judge the living and the dead?

How do we even prepare for such a thing?

Let's take another look at the Gospel lesson -
Being troubled by the sins of Jerusalem, Jesus clears the temple of sin,
And re-establishes what the temple should be and now is:
The new Temple is the body of Christ.
He even prophesied when speaking of His body -
"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

Instead of the temple being the place where God meets man,
the flesh and blood of Jesus becomes the meeting place of God and man.
Previously, lamb's blood was slaughtered in the temple to atone for
and make peace for man's sins.
But God's people did not know the time of God's visitation,
and completely missed that Jesus was the Christ!
So they rejected Him.
They rejected the true Temple.
They rejected the meeting place between God and man -
Which is the body and blood of Jesus,
the lamb of God, sacrificed for their sins,
on the altar of the cross.

We're spared from judgement when our faith takes hold of this promise.
We're spared when we don't reject Christ as the Temple.
We're spared when we're attentive to the Word of God.
We're spared because we're sprinkled clean by the blood of Christ,
Thus becoming temples ourselves,
Where Christ comes to drive out sin, death, and the snares of the devil residing
within our evil hearts,
And where Christ gives us clean hearts, a right spirit willing to follow Christ,
teaching us daily,
And He will dwell with us for life everlasting.

With Christ at the center of our existence,
He clears out the temple of our hearts full of evil.

He replaces that evil with Himself –
Working forgiveness and love in us
when He condescends to the meeting place between God and Man,
here in Jesus' body and blood.
Consequently, our souls are swept and put in order by the grace of God.
Come and receive this peace which surpasses all understanding,
So that our Lord may guard, keep, and strengthen your faith.

INI