

The Story of Redeeming Love

Matt. 23:34-39

Intro. For those who don't have much time for reading, there are Reader's Digest Condensed Books. For students who feel they have even less time than that, there are booklets called Cliff Notes. These publications condense a 300 page volume into 50 pages or less. I wonder how many will confess they've used them?

Omitting detail and color, these condensed versions provide a bare bones account of a much longer story. That's what we find in the closing six verses of **Matt. 23**. This **23rd** chapter is a stand alone discourse given at the Temple in Jerusalem. It serves as a solemn conclusion to the running dispute Jesus had with Israel's religious leaders. In **vs. 1-12** He spoke to the crowds and to His disciples with the Pharisees and Scribes listening in the background. Then as we found last Sunday, Jesus pronounced seven **woes** on these leaders because of their hypocrisy and corruptive influence on the people. The conclusion of this discourse is **vs. 34-39**...our text this morning. These verses are the final message to Israel's ecclesiastical leaders. Here Jesus condensed the story of redemption in just six verses. In three points he exposed the heart of man / the heart of God / and the hope of the world. What follows in **chap. 24, 25** is the Great Olivet Discourse and I can't wait to get there!

So the verses before us this morning present a very concise version of Bible history. As we've often said before, history is really "His-Story."...God's story. The Bible is a 6,000 year storybook of God's dealings with the human beings He created. From **Gen. 3**, we're told how the first couple sinned against God. As a consequence and penalty for the disobedience of Adam and Eve, sin and death entered the world and became the experience of every human being thereafter. This universal predisposition to sin explains why the death rate is 100%.

But in that same third chapter of Genesis God announced His plan to save fallen humanity. His plan would center in the male seed or descendant of a woman who would one day destroy the seed or descendants of the tempter, Satan. (**Gen. 3:15**) Today we know this coming champion or redeemer is the God-man, Jesus Christ. The genealogy of **Lk. 3** shows how Jesus descended from Adam through a select human ancestry. Yet as God's plan moved forward, Satan tried to derail it at every turn. Cain murdered his righteous brother, Abel. The spread of evil and violence on earth prompted God to send a Flood of colossal proportion reducing the earth's population to just 8 adults. Then in defiance of God's command to multiply and fill the earth, human beings did the very opposite. They built a city and a gigantic tower as a symbol of their power. Time and again, God had to intervene to prevent His plan from being derailed. Yet despite these Satanic attacks and despite human disobedience, God's promise to send a redeemer could not be blocked or invalidated.

As time passed, the Lord chose Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees. To Abraham and through Abraham He promised to make a great nation. These promises were repeated to Abraham's son and grandson who were called the Hebrews and later Israel. To this chosen people God gave land, the covenants and His Law. He raised up many faithful leaders through whom He spoke to the nation and by whom He led them. The Lord's consistent intention was to bless Israel and to establish them as a theocratic kingdom of righteousness / prosperity / and peace. And out of this favored nation God planned to send His redeemer and their Messiah.

But the story is long and we only have time to tell a tiny fraction of it. But for our purposes this morning, I want to emphasize this: Despite God's favor and the many blessings He showered on His chosen people, Israel repeatedly turned their backs on Him. Moses called them stiff-necked rebels. They distorted and disobeyed God's commands. They refused to trust Him even after God did such great miracles to protect and preserve them.

They resorted to works and proved they never really understood that their sacrificial system was really a system of salvation by grace through faith. Lurking behind the scenes the same Adversary who tempted Adam was always present to deceive and lure Israel away from the Lord. Their history proves the original sin infected every human heart. Even the greatest blessings and purest Laws can't bring it under control. Israel proved that redemption and the restoration of mankind would have to come by some means other than by the law and human effort.

So the OT is largely a history of failure and repeated consequences experienced by a people group that has been overly blessed. Yet despite their failures...God's plan continued to unfold. When the time was right, He sent the redeemer He promised to send. **Gal. 4:4, 5 - But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons...** Yet when God's redeemer finally arrived, what kind of reception greeted Him? Like a Cliff Note, **Jn. 1:10,11** offers this summary...**He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive Him.** The savior God sent was neither recognized by the world nor received by His own people Israel.

Isn't this what we've discovered throughout our study of Matthew's Gospel? The Jews rejected Jesus. They hated Him without a cause. When they couldn't trap Him they resorted to do what Satan had put in their hearts...they plotted to kill Him. Jesus knew all about this. In fact, before it ever happened, He exposed the whole conspiracy in the parable of **Matt. 21**. This is worth reading again.

vs. 33-41. "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

A summary in Cliff Notes might read like this...The landowner represents God who planted a vineyard with represents Jerusalem and His favored nation. He provided that nation with everything necessary for fruitfulness and profit. He entrusted the care of His nation to leaders represented by the tenant farmers. He then went away. When harvest time came He sent servants who represent the prophets. He expected them to collect some profit from the vineyard. But the landowner's servants were beaten, killed and stoned. They responded the same way when the landowner sent other servants. Finally, the land-owner sent His own son and expected them to treat His son with respect. The son obviously represents Jesus, the Son of God. But when the tenants realized the son was heir to the vineyard, they threw Him out of the vineyard and killed him. Judgment is then predicted as the consequence of their defiance and murderous rejection. The vineyard would be taken from the original tenants and turned over to others who represent Gentiles saved by grace.

By the way, who but the Lord can tell a story precisely before it happens? And who but the Sovereign God can cause even the wickedness of man to praise Him? Yet the plan God devised and the promises He made are irreversible and unstoppable. You see, from the beginning, God planned that Jesus would be rejected and crucified because by means of His son's death He would redeem His fallen world. The cross was no mistake or miscalculation it was the fulfillment of God's plan.

The murderous tenants carried out the plan God established before the foundations of the world were laid. Listen to Peter's sermon in **Acts 2:23 - This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.**

So before time runs out this morning, let's proceed to the condensed version of God's story in **Matt. 23:34-39**. The first part of God's story focuses on the human condition...

1. **The heart of man** – vs. 34-36 – (the condemnation of sinners is imminent)

Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.

The effects of the fall soon showed up in Cain / in the pre-flood population / in the multitudes who rebelled at Babel and in countless other historical instances. In time the Israelites proved they too were infected by the sin nature inherited from Adam. It showed up in their unwillingness and inability to keep God's commands. They rebelled against God by rejecting and killing the prophets God sent to turn them back to Himself. If you glance ahead to v. 37 Jesus characterized the nation represented by their capital city. He said, **O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you.** The same rejection / brutality / and murder of God's servants is told in the parable of the wedding of the King's son in **Matt. 22:1-14. (vs. 6, 7)** Yet unlike the parable of **Matt. 21** where the son of the vineyard owner is murdered, the parable of the **Matt. 22** looks beyond Calvary to the atrocities that would happen after Jesus was crucified / buried / risen / and ascended to heaven. This parable exposes the continued animosity toward the followers of Jesus just as it came to pass in history. And yet there's another difference. The parable of **Matt. 22** doesn't end with Israel's punishment and dispersion. It ends at the marriage celebration in heaven which will happen after Jesus returns.

Note from the language that v. 34 is futuristic. Jesus said, **Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.** Using terminology familiar to the Jews, Jesus here referred to the apostles / prophets / pastor-teachers and believers of the NT era. Did this happen after Jesus ascended? Absolutely! Each apostle was persecuted for his faith and all but John were martyred. The book of Acts reports how Christ's followers were pursued and beaten and forced to flee their Judean homes. Saul of Tarsus was one of the main persecutors before he was converted. Listen to his testimony about the troubles he endured after He trusted Christ. **II Cor. 11:24-25a - Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned...** So the prophecy of v.34 came to pass. And this persecution of Christ's followers has continued to the present. In fact, more Christians have been martyred in the last century than in all of the other centuries combined since Jesus ascended. And this persecution of Jews and Christians will intensify in the coming Tribulation. **Matt. 24:9 - "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me."**

The point of this historical overview is this...the heart of man is sinful and predisposed to hate and resist God. We sin because we're sinners. We rebel because it is our nature to do so. **Jer. 17:9** says, **The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?** Sin is a congenital condition that was transmitted to every one of us. This isn't politically correct nor is it even entertained by people who believe humanity is basically good. But when should we expect this innate goodness to show up? Would you agree with me?...it's been a long time coming!

Listen to **Rom. 8:7** - **...the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.** The Bible says we're sinners because we're wired that way. It's in our DNA to oppose God and resist His authority over us. The sin we see in the world around us as well as the sin in our own hearts can't be corrected by legislation / education / religion / reformation / or the process of time. We all stand in desperate need of a savior. His name is Jesus Christ. He's the redeemer-champion God promised to send from the beginning when Adam first sinned. Through Him God has made it possible for us to be saved and given new hearts. The heart transplant Jesus provides was promised in **Ezek. 36:26** where the Lord said, **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.**

But Jesus is rejected by Israel and the majority of Gentiles. That being the case, in **vs. 35, 36** Jesus said, **And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.** In just two verses Jesus condensed Israel's history of sin from the blood of Abel, the first righteous man to be murdered...to Zechariah, the last prophet murdered in the OT era. Because of this history of rejection and bloodshed, Jesus prophesied a terrible destruction would punish that very generation. This judgment came to pass in 70 AD when the Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. Titus slaughtered or took captive most of the Judean population and scattered the rest.

So **vs. 34-36** presents the heart of man. We come into this life with predisposed hostility toward God. Like the sword of Damocles, we spend our days under His wrath never knowing when sin will catch up with us and God's punishment may fall. If we had lived in the first century, most of us would have rejected Jesus just as Israel did. The human heart hasn't changed or improved even a little. This hatred toward Jesus is declared in the Revelation where it's prophesied that the armies of earth will gather in a vain attempt to destroy Jesus when He returns. But then in bold relief, we're shown...

2. The heart of God – vs. 37, 38 – *(The salvation of sinners is possible)*

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.

Let me read the account of an event that took place a few days earlier. **Lk. 19:41, 42** - **As He (Jesus) approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes.**

We need to sense the intense grief Jesus experienced when He said, **"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem..."** This lamentation was spoken through tears. Think about it...the all-sufficient, sovereign, Creator God of the Universe...wept. You and I are capable of profound emotion because we were made in God's image and likeness. But God experiences emotion more intensely than we ever will. Instead of being angry and vengeful toward those who hated Him...those who were plotting to kill Him and persecute His servants...Jesus was moved to tears...tears of mercy and longing. Jesus saw people in turmoil and distress...people weighed down by the stuff of life / deceived by the Adversary / and controlled by a fallen nature they couldn't overcome.

Here in **Matt. 23:37** He used the familiar image of a hen with her chicks. He said, **"How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing"** Yes, God's story is darkened by human sin and rejection, but that isn't the whole story. Woven in among the carnage of human failure is the loving compassion of a God who longs to redeem and restore His fallen people...a God who longs to gather us and cover us in Himself. Do you know that about God? Have you sensed Him reaching out to you?

In her efforts to gather and protect her chicks the hen provides a word picture that describes the **Shekinah**. Though the name Shekinah doesn't appear in the Bible, the rabbis spoke of Messiah under this name...a name which means "*he caused to dwell.*" The rabbis taught that Israel would one day be gathered under the wings of **Shekinah**. There they would find blessing, security and peace. This is declared in **Psa. 91:1-4** which says, **He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.** Of course God doesn't have wings or feathers. The imagery speaks of God's loving protection. The Lord wants to gather us and cover us with Himself.

The balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility is seen in the phrase, "**but you were not willing.**" Here the God of intense emotion and longing is desperate in His desire to gather the people He loves...but they're not willing to be gathered. This is still the case today. The Lord isn't willing for anyone to perish (**II Pet. 3:9**)...but each person must personally repent and come to Him.

A few moments ago we read the summary of human rejection in **Jn. 1:10, 11- He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.** Now listen to the next verse, **Jn. 1:12** says, **Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—** If you remember the sermon a few weeks ago, and I'm sure you remember every word...we said one reason Jesus rebuked Israel's false leaders was to protect us from error. We spare no effort to protect those we love and so does Jesus. In **vs.37, 38** He opened His heart to reveal God's love and mercy...a mercy that reaches out even to those who had made themselves His enemies. How great is that love? John wrote, **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. – I Jn. 4:10** In just a few days Jesus would allow wicked men to arrest Him / falsely accuse Him / treat Him brutally / and then condemn Him to a horrible death on a cross. And from that cross Jesus said, *Father destroy them...* No, He said, **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** - **Lk. 23:34.**

But speaking to those who were refusing Him, Jesus said, **Look, your house is left to you desolate. House** may refer specifically to the Temple or more generally to the nation (ie. the house of Israel). It could also refer to Judaism as a religion. At any rate, the **Shekinah** who wanted to lovingly gather and protect His people was rejected and no longer welcome in their house so he left.

When referring to the Temple earlier, Jesus called it "**My house**" - **Mt. 21:13.** Some suggest the Temple was so secularized and devoid of God that Jesus could only refer to it as **your house.** His ownership, authority and presence was no longer welcome there. This reminds me of a tour guide we had in Rome. The cathedrals in Rome are tremendously impressive. But our guide's quiet and surprising comment was this..."*God didn't build these cathedrals...men did.*" At any rate, Jesus, speaking as the holy and sovereign God, said, "**Your house is left to you desolate**" or empty.

But isn't this the status of every person who rejects God and the salvation He provided? God has no place in their house...their lives. In **Eph. 2:12** Paul spoke of every person who has not yet trusted Christ for salvation. **...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.** Yet because the compassion and mercy of God is still extended, the salvation of sinners is possible. It was possible in that day just as it is today. But each person must be willing to repent of sin and come to Christ in faith. Though darkened by the hearts of people who have hated and rejected Him, God's story is illumined by His own redeeming love reaching out to mankind. And like so many books written by the OT prophets, God's story never ends without rays of hope.

3. The hope of the world - v. 39 – (*The exaltation of Jesus is guaranteed*)

“For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'”

As God’s story continues in this condensed version, we see that Jesus expressed a certainty about the future. This is something you and I can’t do. We can’t even predict what will happen tomorrow or the day after. **Jas. 4:14 - Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.** But Jesus knows the plan of God. He knows the future as well as the past and the present because as God, this is His Story. So Jesus foretold a future event that is certain to happen even though 2,000 years have passed since He spoke these words. Let’s break it down.

If we invert the negative, Jesus said, **you will...see Me again.** Speaking to men who represented Israel, Jesus said this...*“regardless of what you do to Me this weekend, you will see Me again.”* He didn’t say, *“you may see me again.”* He said **“you will see me again.”** Jesus already explained to His disciples that He would be arrested / crucified / and on the third day raised from the dead. Because His return is certain, Jesus promised, **you will see me again.** Here’s a promise every human being should claim. Jesus will return and the Bible promises every eye will see Him and every knee will bow to Him. **Rev. 1:7 - Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.**

And notice...Jesus indicated *when* this would happen. He said **you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'** Isn’t this what the crowd shouted during the event we call the Triumphal Entry? **Matt. 21:9 - The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"** Yet within the week, the crowd showed their true colors. In unbelief they turned on Jesus and shouted, **“We have no king but Caesar.”**

Here Jesus refers to a day that will follow the Great Tribulation when God turns the hearts of His people to Himself. **Zech. 12:10 - "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on Me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.** In the next chapter, **Zech. 13:8, 9** says, **In the whole land," declares the LORD, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'"**

Concerning the coming salvation of Israel, Paul wrote, **And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."** - **Rom. 11:26, 27** The praise offered on Palm Sunday was just a miniature preview of what will take place when Jesus returns.

The point is this...though darkened by human failure and hearts turned against Him, God’s story is illumined by His own redeeming love...a love that patiently reaches out to gather and protect those who come to Him. Extending backward and forward in time, God’s story doesn’t end without hope. Jesus is coming. And listen...this hope belongs to each person who believes! God’s story has become our story. Though our hearts were once turned against Him, God has overcome our resistance by His love and grace. Our savior is the hope of the world and when He returns in power and glory, we will return with Him.

When He comes the second time He has promised to make everything right. Did you hear me? Everything. This is our blessed hope. The exaltation of Jesus is 100% guaranteed!

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.” What Jesus said to Jerusalem, He says to every human being who hasn't yet trusted Him to forgive them and save them. Just insert your name. You can trust Him right now. You can tell Christ you believe He died to save you and ask Him to be your redeemer and King. God's promise is this...**"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."** - Rom. 10:13