

### **Matthew 23:34-39**

**Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town.<sup>35</sup> 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.**

**<sup>36</sup>Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation.<sup>37</sup> “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, and you were not willing.<sup>38</sup> Look, your house is left to you desolate.<sup>39</sup> For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”**

Dear Friends in Christ,

The time that this morning's text takes place is just a few days before the suffering and death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The gospel writers Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell us that in these final days before our Lord's death on Good Friday a lot of things occurred. Not only was there the necessary preparation for the feast of the Passover, but Jesus was involved in many other important works. The Gospel writers record a number of miracles, a great deal of preaching, and a lot of explanation about things that Jesus had taught in the past. Since Jesus knew He was about to suffer and die, this final week was a time to prepare His disciples for what was to come. In many ways it was their final chance to learn all they could before Jesus death. It was their final chance to learn directly from Christ what they as His disciples were supposed to do.

But Jesus did not use this time merely to tell His disciples what they were to do, but He also used it as a time to warn them as to what not to do. For as Jesus talks to his disciples in this final week before His suffering and death, He points out how the leaders of Israel, men called to be shepherds of God's people, failed to do what God had commanded. They were called by God to watch for the coming of the Savior. It was their job to point to the Messiah and the way of life eternal. Their job was to show the common people of Israel God's great grace and glory in sending a Savior.

But they didn't do this. Instead we find the Scribes and Pharisees, the Sadducees and the priests all telling the people that they had to earn their way to life eternal. They were not pointing the way to heaven, they were pointing the way to eternal death and damnation. Because of their failure to do what God commanded them, Jesus refers to them as being like blind men. They did not see what they were to do and they did not see where they were to lead the people. Because of this spiritual blindness, they had led generations of God's people away from God to the sorrow of eternal death.

Though Jesus says this as a condemnation of those false teachers, He also wants to give His disciples, all of His disciples, a good understanding about false teachers. Because when we think of false teachers it is easy to look at it as being their problem, their shortcoming and their sin in not doing what God wants them to do. We tend to put the blame on just them. But Jesus points out that this is also a problem for those that they are leading. For it was not just the Scribes and Pharisees who were going to face God's wrath, but Israel as a whole, under the leadership of the Scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees, was being led to eternal death and damnation. Like sheep being led to the slaughter, the majority of them were led to their eternal damnation.

As we look at this portion of Scripture that we are considering today, we can see that these are the people that Christ is addressing. He is lamenting over all those millions of people, all those generations of

God's chosen people that were misled by the errors of the false teachers. And even though we may like to think that they were innocent victims of the heresies of the Scribes and Pharisees, Christ points out that the responsibility lies with them as well. It is not just the false teachers who are guilty, but all those who knowingly or unknowingly join in with them are under the same condemnation of God. They are people who have given up their eternal life for the false teachings of the day.

And please don't consider this a rare event. The ancient Israelites are not the only people who blindly followed false teachers. It is a problem that still occurs today. The false teachers and leaders in cults like the Mormons, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Muslims are certainly going to face God's just judgment for their blasphemies. But those who follow them will not be free from God's condemnation.

No one forced them to believe the false teachings of these and other cults. No one made them deny the truth for teachings that are filled with hatred, lies and condemnation. It was their choice to leave God's simple Gospel of salvation by Grace alone to wallow in the false belief that somehow or some way we sinners can save ourselves.

But even with it being our fault for rejecting God and leave His saving Grace, we find that God is not so fast in giving up on us. His love for mankind is so great that even in the face of our rejecting Him, God keeps coming back to us to turn us from our sins to the joy that is found in Christ alone.

Today's text really brings this message to the forefront. It reminds us that in all situations, even when we are rejecting the Grace that can save us, God is there offering us the hope of everlasting life through the power of His Gospel. Our theme is one that encourages us to see this great gift from God and says,

**THEME: See God's Gracious Offering To Us**

- 1. He offers us the free gift of salvation**
- 2. He offers this free gift often**

**1. He offers us the free gift of salvation**

Now as we look at the first part of our text for today and consider this working of God that gives us salvation, it is only meaningful, it is only important to us, if we understand that there is nothing we can do to get this salvation. For contrary to common belief and what is being taught in so many churches and cults, is this idea that we as human beings can somehow take part in our salvation. From the very small notion that we can "choose God" to the greater heresies that insist our works will merit eternal life, sinful mankind has the idea that we can somehow take part in our salvation or that salvation is something we do on our own. And whether it is a message of salvation by helping God or a message of salvation apart from God, anything we claim to do to save ourselves truly cheapens the very best Gift that God has given us, the gift of His Son as our one and only means of salvation.

For Scripture is clear that Jesus Christ alone is the way the truth and the life. It is clear that we are sinful and that there is no way that we can get to heaven on our own but rather we are dead in our trespasses and sins and it is only through the working of the Holy Spirit that we are able to know Christ as our Lord and Savior.

And this message is given by Christ freely. It is given without cost and without price. For the Gospel is not something that anyone must earn or buy, but it is poured out by the Holy Spirit into all the world. Those Jews who were around Christ heard it as He preached to them. People who pick up a Bible read it are also offered this gift of salvation. Your co-workers learn it through your words of truth. You learn of it here week after week. And never once is there a charge or a demand. Never once is there anything but the proclamation that Jesus died that you might live. There is nothing in this life that is given so freely except maybe the air we breathe.

### 3. He offers this free gift often

And very much like the air we breathe, the Gospel is everywhere. For Jesus speak to that very point when He says, **“Therefore, I am sending you prophets, sages and teachers.”** One part of this sentence is especially important, the present tense verb, **“sending.”** In the Greek the present tense always has an ongoing idea. Jesus is really saying that He is continually sending out prophets and wise men and scribes so that the free Gospel might always be heard. Day in and day out He is sending well trained pastors and teachers, He is sending untrained laymen and laywomen, He is sending children new to the faith, all of whom are in the service of Christ preaching this word of God.

Why, because Jesus knows how important the Gospel message is. It is the best He has to offer us and so He gives it freely and He gives it often so that many will be brought to the knowledge of life eternal. But even as Jesus explain how He gives this precious gift, we find that there will still be many who will exercise their freedom to reject God. Like Israel we find people that will turn us away when we preach the Word. Co-workers will shun us. Professors will ridicule us. Fellow students will laugh at us or mock us. Neighbors will stop talking to us. We may even find that family members no longer want to be around us because we preach Christ crucified, a message they do not want to hear.

For even as Israel killed, crucified and scourged those who brought the good news, we will find the same things today. But like Christ, the encouragement to you is to do even as He did. For faced with the rejection that He had seen so often, Jesus did not bring down fire and brimstone on Jerusalem but rather He said, **“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, and you were not willing.”** The desire of God is to offer this gift of salvation often. Through people like us, God sends his gift of grace throughout the world over and over and over again. In what seems a never ending flow of his grace and love the gospel is proclaimed through people like us to those who need salvation.

Granted, there always seems to come a time when God’s gift of salvation is pulled back. It seems that even God as an end to his amazing generosity. For we know that even though Jesus desire to gather together the lost of Israel and to have them come to the knowledge of the truth, there was a time when the end of Jerusalem did come. The opportunity to hear the gospel and ended. God’s chosen people were no longer chosen for life eternal, but fulfilled the promise of God that hearing they would not hear and seeing they would not see. Though God wanted to save them, they no longer wanted anything to do with His gift of grace and the life eternal it brings. .

Such a message for us is really twofold. On the one hand, it is the encouragement to be Christ-like in our evangelism efforts. We are to go out and freely and often tell others what has been done on their behalf. We are to proclaim with joy the Good News of salvation won by Christ alone. Whether it is a formal evangelism program with flyers, canvassing, signs and billboards in all that people try to reach the lost, or just the simple conversations across the table which explain Christ salvation to those who have never heard it, we are called to preach the word. That is our privilege as ones sent out by Christ.

And the second message that this text brings to us is that even when we are sinful and reject God and turn from His Grace, He is longsuffering. He is patient. He will continue to try to win us.

In the lament of Christ, let us know that His Gospel is given freely and given often that all might have the hope of life eternal. Amen.