HOLY WEEK – 24

INTRODUCTORY PAGE

The Final Showdown

From the beginning of time the devil set himself up as an alternative and superior authority to God. (see Genesis 3). He did this primarily through working in the hearts and minds of people to undermine their trust in God. He did it in many other ways too so that the whole of God’s creation is tainted by his murderous influence. As a result, we live in a dangerous and damaged world, which only gets worse as the years go by.

2000 years ago, God sent His Son Jesus into this world to be our Saviour. His whole life was committed to this cause as He battled with His ruthless enemy.

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Sadly, instead of honouring their commission to serve God and draw people to Him, the religious leaders of the day had turned things around to their own advantage. Religion for them had become a self-seeking enterprise, and instead of caring for people, they were exploiting them. Many (though not all of them) had in fact become agents of the devil.

In His mission to Save the World Jesus was fighting a battle on two fronts. Holy Week is the name given to the final week of Jesus’ earthly life when the dreadful battle reached its conclusion. In our display we set out the key events of the week which ended with Good Friday.

We have called our display “the Final Showdown” to reflect the deadly contest between Jesus and the opposing powers.

MONDAY

Luke, in his Gospel (ch. 2:22ff) tells how the infant Jesus was brought by His parents into the Temple to be presented to the Lord according to the Law of Moses (Lev. 12:2-6). Old Simeon was there and prophesied **“This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed…”**

At the age of 12 Jesus entered the Temple again and amazed the religious teachers by His understanding as He debated with them.

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As an adult, Jesus taught in the Temple. However, the Temple authorities felt threatened by His teaching and were watching Him carefully. Yesterday’s excitement among the joyful crowds as Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey greatly upset them. The Old Testament prophet, Zechariah (9:9) had long ago foretold that their king would enter this way.

After it was over, and before returning to Bethany for the night, Jesus took a final look around the Temple.

Today, on the way into Jerusalem, Jesus had wept over the degenerate state of Jerusalem. (Luke 19:41-44) There were leaves but no fruit on a fig-tree as Jesus and His disciples passed by. To their surprise, Jesus cursed it and said it would never again bear fruit. (Matt: 21:18ff., Mark 11:12-14)

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The Old Testament prophets had spoken out against those whose task it was to administer things on behalf of the people. The Temple, to which they looked for their position and security, and in which they were called to serve was not the place where people could draw near and find peace with God. The elaborate sacrificial system had become an end in itself and was corrupted. The money changers and merchants were part of the system intended to help people reverence God and understand the seriousness of their sin. Birds and animals were slaughtered in their place. Very likely the High Priests were creaming off the revenue for this themselves, while poor people suffered.

This was never going to be the final solution to the barrier caused by man’s sin before a holy God. God Himself would soon provide a more adequate remedy. (Heb. 10:1-10)

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RATTLING CAGES

Malachi 3:1 “The Lord whom you seek will come into His Temple”

Jesus, the Messiah entered His Temple to reclaim it. Quoting Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11 He declared “My temple will be a place for prayer for all nations, but you have turned it into a den of thieves”.

He drove out the merchants and their customers, and knocked over the money-changers’ tables and of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to bring goods into the Temple. (Matt: 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-17, Luke 19:45-46, John 2:14-16)

In this dramatic scene it wasn’t only the birds whose cages were rattled – the Jewish leaders were rattled too! In their eyes they were the authorities – not this Man. What made it even worse for them was the way children were crying out “Hosanna to the Son of David”. To them this was blasphemy and Jesus hadn’t even tried to stop them - in fact He affirmed their words of praise. (Matt. 21:16). This certainly wasn’t in the remit of the authorities!

The cages of the people were rattled too – in their case they were being set free! Jesus was giving life and healing right there in the Temple (Matt. 21:14).

A Question for your reflection: Are there areas of your life that feel “caged in”.

TUESDAY

The Fig Tree that Jesus cursed yesterday had withered to its roots. (Matt: 10:19, Mark 11:20-21)

In Palestine fig trees were everywhere. They symbolised fertility, peace and prosperity. They were big trees, great for sheltering under in the hot sun. The nation of Israel had been characterised as a fig-tree, but now God’s judgement was on them for failing to recognise His Son in their midst. Like a tree full of leaves but with no fruit - the Temple, though full of religious activity, was barren and destined to fall.

(Luke 21: 37-38) “Every day Jesus was teaching in the Temple”

This week would have been physically and emotionally draining for Jesus. While, knowing how the week would end and with the Pharisees constantly on his back, Jesus continued teaching the people right under their noses. Unlike most of us who would have backed off or hidden ourselves away long before this, He courageously stood His ground. He had a job to do, the people needed to hear the Good News and He was committed to go on preaching to all who would listen.

The Chief Priests, asserting what they believed to be their “human rights” demanded to know on whose authority He had driven out the merchants yesterday. (Mark 11:27-33). Without answering their demands directly, He turned the situation around by asking them a question about John’s baptism. (Mark 11:30). They could not answer it without getting themselves into hot water.

Jesus told a series of parables pointing at them:

In the “Parable of the two sons” (Matt. 21: 28-32) they were condemned for not listening to John the Baptist. It was a shocking fact that the people they regarded as the most wicked, i.e. tax collectors and prostitutes, believed John and would enter God’s Kingdom before their so-called “spiritual leaders”.

In the parable “of the tenants” (Matt. 21:33-44, Mark 12:1-11, Luke 20:9-18) the Scribes, Chief Priests and Pharisees were described as disobedient, thieving, murderers. No wonder they were upset!

The parable of “the wedding feast” (Matt: 22:1-14) demonstrates how they would be judged for rejecting God’s invitation to the Messianic banquet which is open to everyone.

The crowds were thrilled, while the Jewish leadership were exposed and humiliated. At this time they were powerless to do anything about it because of Jesus’ popularity with the people. They could not risk the possibility of a riot if they tried to arrest Him, so they tried a more subtle approach, hoping that could trick Jesus into incriminating Himself.

Jesus’ authority threatened every power structure. The situation brought together different groups who didn’t normally consort well together. Their representatives approached Him with a series of difficult theological questions (Mark 12). Jesus parried all their attacks. After that they didn’t dare ask Him any more questions!

Jesus delivered a scathing attack on the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:1-39, Mark 12:38-40, Luke 20:45-47) and warned the crowds against them.

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For the disciples these days must have been an emotional roller-coaster. They were on their own journey, with much to learn. The grandeur of the Temple complex caught their eye, but Jesus predicted its fall. This happened in AD 70 - now all that is left is the western (wailing) wall. All very disturbing.

A question for your reflection: What is dead in your life that needs to go?