

# Why Does God Bother With Us?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     The verse which we've read but I want to read it again this time from the Gospel by Matthew. The Gospel by Matthew in chapter 23 and it's verse number 37. Matthew 23 in verse 37.

It's a similar verse to what we read in the Gospel by Luke. We read there in Matthew 23 verse 37 it's on page 992.

O 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. And we'll read on. Look your house is left to you desolate, for I tell you you will not see me again until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Napoleon Bonaparte is credited with calling the English a nation of shopkeepers.

And if you were a shopkeeper, chances were that this past week you would be taking time to put away all the paraphernalia that you had in the shop for Easter. The posters with chickens and bunnies marking down the unsold Easter eggs and the hot cross buns and so on.

[ 2 : 0 5 ]     The same sort of thing would have taken your time after Christmas, putting away the tinsel and the fairy lights and whatever. It's quite amazing how we have put surrounding the two greatest events in the Christian calendar, Christmas and Easter. We've surrounded them with so many things that in themselves have absolutely nothing to do with the events that are celebrated by these Christian realities. And our secular society is quite happy to buy into these things, apart from anything else, good holidays, go along with them. But the truth is that we all buy into these things too. I'm sure quite a number of us, including myself, have enjoyed an Easter egg or two and whatever. There are so many accretions put around the truth. And all of this is not unlike the situation that confronted Jesus when he encountered the religious situation in Jerusalem during his earthly ministry. So the words I've taken for our text this morning have, I believe, a real relevance for us, just as they had for the people in Jerusalem a long time ago. The historical context, of course, was vitally important. But the relevance of the words reached far beyond that to ourselves. We haven't read read chapter 23 in Matthew. But if you take a cursory glance down through this chapter, you'll find in verses 13 and 15 and 16, 23, 25, 27 and 29, these verses all begin with the words of Jesus, woe to you. He was speaking into the religious situation, he was speaking about the religious leaders who confronted him at that time and who had built up piles of their own laws and ceremonies around the faith that God had delivered to his Old Testament people centuries before. And the result was, just as with our accretions around Easter time and

Christmas, the truth itself became clouded over. It was buried under a plethora of man-made things.

And the result, of course, was that the people were not hearing God's true word. And when anybody threatened that situation, they were vilified and in the case of Jesus, done away with. So we find this chapter is a very hard-hitting chapter. The picture we have of gentle Jesus, meek and mild, is one that is turned on its head in this chapter when Jesus becomes really aggressive in his attitude towards those who so misrepresented God and the truth that God had delivered to the people.

The religious leaders who had caused this terrible pall of what Jesus said was hypocrisy to settle over their religion. And of course, the tragedy was that this wasn't a new thing in their day, just as it's not a new thing in ours. This had been going on for ages, long before Jesus had arrived on the scene. In fact, it had been going on for so long that the religious leaders just accepted it and they added to it all the time, so that as each generation succeeded generation, the truth became more and more clouded and the people in so many ways were further and further and further away from God. So much so that you wonder why God bothered with them at all.

But remember, I've been saying that the relevance of the words didn't stop with that immediate historical situation in Jerusalem. We too have built our own hypocrisies around Bible religion and we wonder why God bothers with us.

[ 8 : 44 ] Let's look a little more closely then at verse number 37. And there are two things which strike us about this verse. The first thing is the amazing persistence of God in being gracious to the people. And the second fact is the equally amazing persistence of people in rejecting the overtures that God was making to them.

Look first at the amazing persistence of God. Jesus cried over Jerusalem, oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who sent to you.

How often I've longed to gather you. How often. The fact is God wants people to trust him. God wants people to love him and to follow him.

That is why God bothers with us. And it's apparent from the very earliest words in the Bible.

You remember the story of Adam and Eve. Created good, placed in a perfect environment, but they sinned against God. And when they sinned against God they tried to hide themselves from God, but God went looking for them. You'll read in Genesis chapter 3 the poignant words coming from God. Adam, where are you? He was looking for his estranged children.

[ 11 : 19 ] And that's the story that we find right through the Old Testament. In the book of Genesis again we have the story of Abraham pleading with God to save Lot who had gone to Sodom and God was going to destroy Sodom. And Abraham pleaded with God.

If there's only 40 people there, will you save him? Only 30, 20 and so he went on. And God in grace saved Lot who perhaps in some ways had wandered far from God himself.

In the prophets we read in Isaiah for example in chapter 1 God tells how he loved Israel at the beginning, but Israel wandered away from him. And God asks this poignant question, why? What have I done that the people should be against him? And then later on towards the end of the book he says all day long I've stretched out my hands to this obstinate people. God continued to bother with them. And in Jeremiah one of the most poignant verses in the Bible I think in chapter 9 and in verse 1 where the prophets speaking the words of God said oh that my head were a stream of water that my eyes were a fountain of tears that I might weep for the slain of the daughter of my people, the tears of God in the eyes of his prophet. And in Ezekiel

I looked on them with pity. He wanted them to follow his ways and when they were not following his ways he said I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. When Israel was a child he says I loved him and called him out of Egypt. That's what he says in Hosea and he wanted them to follow him. And in the last book of the Bible in that chapter that we read in Malachi the last book of the Old Testament rather in Malachi chapter 3 God said return to me and I will return to you.

And then we come to the words of Jesus himself. Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem how often, how often I've longed to gather you together. Friends God is persistently gracious. And that persistence, that graciousness hasn't stopped. The gospel is still proclaimed. God continues to call us. The voice of Jesus reverberates down through the ages. Come unto me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Follow me says Jesus. The most familiar invitation that he offers.

[ 15 : 31 ] Repent, believe the gospel. Trust in God, trust also in me. It's the invitation of our persistently gracious God. How often? Thank God that he continues to bother with us.

But if that's the first obvious thing in this verse, the second one is this persistent stubbornness on the part of people. People just like you and me. By their stubbornness I mean a refusal to accept the gracious invitation of God to trust him, to follow him, to love him, to believe in him, to believe in him and to walk in his ways. And you see that from the very beginning.

Just as the Bible gives us a multitude of examples of God's perseverance, it also gives us a multitude examples of people's perseverance in their stubbornness in not believing in God.

And we know from the New Testament story how people refuse to believe in Jesus Christ. They crucified the Lord of glory.

And we're still at the same game, aren't we? Many people hear the word time and time and time and time again. Perhaps you're like that. And we sit through it all, but we don't believe.

[ 17 : 41 ] There are many people who say, well, I can't believe. I'm a scientist and science and the Christian faith are incompatible.

And yet you find other scientists who are perfectly comfortable with their Christian faith and their belief in Jesus as their savior. At the east end of George Street, there's the statue of James Clark Maxwell, one of the greatest scientific minds ever produced in this country. He was not only a scientist, but an eminently godly Christian man. It's not science per se that prevents men or women believing in God. You get other people who have a philosophical bent and they may follow David Hume, whose statue is down just not many yards away from here.

And they say that in their philosophy and their beliefs associated with it, that these beliefs are incompatible with a Christian commitment.

They don't encourage anyone to believe the truths that God is declaring through his word. And yet you get philosophers who are Christians as well, so that it's not philosophy per se that causes people not to believe. There are many people who have a theological objection because they say, well, I can't believe. I read in the Bible about election, predestination, and I have to wait until God awakens me before I can follow Jesus Christ.

I believe in election and predestination. That does not prevent me from following Jesus.

[ 20 : 16 ] I believe all these things. There are others who have a lifestyle that they know would have to change. There are commitments they have that would be incompatible with following Christ.

So they say, no, I don't want to embarrass myself or others with whom I have relationships or commitments or whatever or the kind of work I do and that sort of thing. And I'm not going to follow Jesus for that reason. Notice how Jesus frames his words. How often he says, I have longed to gather your children together and then at the end of the verse, but you were not willing. That is the crux of the whole matter. You were not willing.

Does that strike you if you have not yet committed your life to Christ? You may have all these other objections, but the words of Jesus cuts through them all.

The Bible is not anti-intellectual. It has not belittling any of the problems that people have, but it's telling us the truth when it says that it's our willingness regarding Christ regarding Christ that stubbornly keeps us away from him if that's your situation today.

So there we have these two great facts presented by this verse, the gracious persistence of God, the continuing stubbornness of people, but there's something more here and this is how I want to finish.

[ 22 : 43 ] The Bible lays these two facts before us, but it doesn't leave them there. Look at Jesus' picture here. He says, oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who killed the prophets and stoned those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. That's a very homely, homely picture.

Why does a hen gather her chickens under her wings? Surely it's to give them security to save the chicks from danger and to assure them of protection. It's the hen's nature to save her brood.

That's telling us Jesus' attitude to you and to me. He wants us under his protection.

He's not called the saviour for nothing. He wants to save us, to save us from the implications of our own sinful natures by bringing us to himself under the wonder of his redemption, forgiveness and grace. Because the fact is that outside of Jesus' salvation, outside of his grace, outside of him, there is no security. As he tells the people in Jerusalem, the house of your life will lie desolate at the end, no matter what heights of achievement we may have in this life, in one field or another. Jesus only is the sure foundation for salvation. Remember Easter, remember the cross and the resurrection and come to Christ today. God bothers with us because he loves us and he wants to save people. That's why Jesus came and that's the salvation he offers today. He is a gracious God. Your grace alone, oh God, speaks pardoning love to me.

Your power alone, oh Son of God, can set my spirit free. I bless the Christ of God.

[ 26 : 11 ] I rest on love divine and with unfaltering lip and heart I call this Savior mine.

Can you say that today? If not, Jesus is saying, come, follow me. Amen. Shall we pray together?

Dear Lord, we thank you for your word and pray that you would follow our preaching of it with your saving grace in the hearts of each one so that we all may know and follow Jesus for his name's sake. Amen. Now in closing we are going to sing to God's praise. In the hymn, hear his love vast as the ocean. A hymn that explains the gospel in song. Shall we stand to sing?

Hear his love vast as the ocean. Loving kindness as the flood. When the grims of life are ransom, shed for us his precious blood. Who is all, will not remember, who can cease to sing his praise? He can never.