

Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ

Lecture 17

Jesus heads for the final conflict in Jerusalem

Introduction

- Conflict was an integral part of Jesus' life and context of ministry even from the earliest days – Jesus soon became a popular figure among the people wherever He went – but His popularity soon stirred the attention of the religious leaders who found Him a threat and His teaching an even greater threat to their control over the minds and hearts of the average Jew
- The early conflicts were very much related to Jesus' actions of apparent disregard for the Sabbath, one of the two signs of the covenant (circumcision and the Sabbath) – see Luke 6:1-11; 13:10-17 – Jesus' resistance to their teaching and practices (based on the Law – cf. Matt.5:17) brought relief to the ordinary people and anger to the religious hierarchy (13:17)
- Consequently these religious leaders were determined to trap Jesus so that they could find a legitimate reason to get rid of Him – but Jesus could not and would not allow Himself to be trapped by them – the more they tried, the more humiliated these religious leaders became in the eyes of the general public – which brought about the crisis: He must be removed from the scene once and for all – so they began to plot His death – Jesus made numerous references to the way Israel had over the centuries killed the prophets that God had sent to them and that they would continue to do the same – Luke 11:37-54 (** v.49) – notice how Jesus cut through all the external hypocritical behaviour of these leaders and exposed their hearts – in this Jesus was once again manifesting His divine nature, having true discernment of the motives and the condition of a man's heart – also Luke 13:34-35; 20:9-19
- What were the fundamental issues? Why were these leaders so opposed to Jesus? Shouldn't He have tried a little harder to win their support? If only He had taken a softer approach, then wouldn't He have attracted many more disciples to follow Him?

The approaching and final conflict in Jerusalem

- Jerusalem, “city of peace” (El Kuds = “holy city” for Arabs), the summit of Jesus’ suffering and also of His glory – the place where Jesus would Himself become the bridge of peace for all nations so that all peoples might freely cross over this bridge and be welcomed into God’s holy presence – hence in God’s plan, Jerusalem lay at the end of Jesus’ earthly journey
- After travelling in ministry around Galilee and surrounding regions, also occasionally in Samaria, Jesus would finally travel “up” to Jerusalem (Jerusalem was a higher elevation than Galilee) – there is much rich symbolism in this fact – Jerusalem had been once an impregnable, Jebusite fortress/stronghold that King David had captured for his God – from that point on, Jerusalem became the very heartland or centre of the Jewish faith – it was their holy city, the holy temple had been built there (i.e. the place where God dwelt among His people on earth), the one and only place for God’s people, the Jews, to offer up their sacrifices to God – and it was there that Jesus knew the final spiritual conflict would take place – not primarily a conflict between Him and His enemies, the religious leaders (supported by the Roman authorities) but a conflict between light and darkness, between God’s Prince of peace wrestling with and crushing the prince of darkness – the place where Satan’s power would be broken and smashed once and for all – see Gen.3:15 (when the Seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent)
- Jesus Himself was fully aware from the very beginning what Jerusalem meant for Him, what lay ahead for Him there – the place where He would face His greatest hatred and suffering – yet we are in awe of the fact that Jesus does not shrink back for one instant from moving towards this goal – He is totally upfront with His disciples all throughout His ministry about what lay ahead of Him – Luke 9:21-22, 43b-45; 18:31-34 (plus the many other times not included in the Gospel records) – they heard Jesus’ words though they weren’t yet able to understand them, not until after Jesus’ resurrection – note also that Jesus spoke in this way as a commentary to follow on from some high point of ministry or experience, moments when the disciples, as typical of the pious of that day, would have been thinking about the dawning or the coming of the long-awaited Kingdom, eg Peter’s confession (“You are the Christ...” – Matt.16:16; Mark 8:29), Jesus’ transfiguration (Matt.17:9)

- Yet Jesus' eyes were fixed or set on this goal – He had come to fulfil the mission of His Father, to offer Himself up as a sin offering for the sins of all – He knew that this would / must take place in Jerusalem – so even though there were occasions earlier in His ministry when Jesus would visit Jerusalem with His disciples (John 5:1; 7:1-10), He purposefully stayed away from this hotbed of hatred and ministered in other regions and also spent time discipling and training His intimate group of followers – however, one particular day for which Jesus had come into the world arrived – on that day He turned His face resolutely towards the city of Jerusalem – Luke 9:51; Mark 10:32-34 – this was the defining moment in the life and ministry of Jesus and also for His disciples – there was no turning back – His heart was set and He led the way even if His disciples were both amazed and distressed by what was happening before their very eyes – Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem in order to lay down His life – He would lay it down; it wouldn't be taken from Him (as if His enemies would be in control – we will notice in the latter part of the story how Jesus went forward to meet His captors, rather than running away or trying to resist) – cf. John 10:14,15,17 – Jesus as the Lamb of God would not resist or fight but would voluntarily lay His life down as the Father had willed – He was on His way to Jerusalem to become the perfect sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:29)
- Notice Jesus' pure and single-minded purpose – not shrinking back from the suffering – fully confident that He was in the Father's hands – see Psalm 16:8-11 – He was undeterred by the opposition or the threats – He knew exactly what was going on in the background with the plotting and scheming – He knew how it would come to a head and who would be the key "players" – with steady pace Jesus kept moving towards the Father's goal – to the point when He would glorify the Father through His ultimate obedience and sacrifice – see John 12:23-33; 17:1,4-5 – note in John's Gospel, Jesus' death is the high point, the summit where Jesus is glorified – when He would ascend the hill of Calvary – when He would be "lifted up" (N.B. "lifting up" on the cross to die is at the same moment the "glorifying/exalting" of Jesus as God's appointed Messiah, His great Suffering Servant – Isaiah 53:4-6) so that all men might receive life through looking up to Him – see John 3:13-15 (Note: theme of "glory" or "exaltation" plays a prominent role in the Gospels: Luke 2:32 – Jesus' coming was for the glory of His people, Israel; Luke 9:28ff – Jesus' intimate circle of three disciples were given a glimpse of the coming glory of Jesus – see vs.26,31-32; Luke 19:38; 21:17 – Jesus' entry

into Jerusalem was greeted with astonishing words of praise and glory to God; Luke 24:26 – after His resurrection, Jesus explains to His followers God’s appointed pathway to glory)

- That may have been Jesus’ awareness and His vision – but the understanding of His disciples, as was the case for the majority of the faithful of their day, was entirely on a different level – in their thinking, Jerusalem was the place where they would see the dawning of the new day – the coming of the kingdom – the place where the powers of this world would be overthrown by God’s Messiah and Deliverer – so for the disciples, going to Jerusalem had nothing to do with dying but rather with conquering and the ushering in of the great kingdom of God – Jesus was their “Messiah” but this certainly had nothing to do with suffering and death but with victory and greatness and glory – see Luke 19:11 – furthermore, they saw themselves as becoming front-running participants in this greatest of all *kairos* moments of history, the moment that the prophets had long prophesied and for which God’s people had waited for – so as they followed Jesus on His journey to Jerusalem, their thinking was focused on such issues as who would be given the top positions in Jesus’ kingdom – see Mark 10:35-45 – James and John wanted to get ahead of the others and asked if they could have the top positions in the coming kingdom – for them, these weren’t impudent or insincere questions but rather questions based upon their present understanding of what Jesus, their Messiah (cf. Matt.16:16), was about to inaugurate in Jerusalem – in their minds, Jesus would soon step out of His roles as Teacher and Healer and step into His role as God’s conquering King – cf. OT Scriptures as Psalms 2, 110 etc. – we will see this again in the story of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem riding on a foal of an ass
- However, Jesus’ disciples could not escape other outward realities = the antagonism coming to a boil around them, the growing fanaticism and hatred among Jesus’ enemies – they could also feel the sombre atmosphere in which they were living out each day – they could sense Jesus’ serious mood as He led them on their way to Jerusalem – His words and teaching increasingly focused on death, impending trials, a crisis and conflict ahead – they witnessed His tears over Jerusalem – Luke 19:41-44 (cf. Matt.23:37-39) – cf. Thomas’ reaction in John 11:7,16

- Questions to be answered in the next lecture:
 - What would happen as Jesus entered Jerusalem?
 - What actions would Jesus take following His entry there?
 - What would be the significance of these events in Salvation-History?
 - What was Jesus doing during that final week leading up to His capture?

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