Matthew 23:37-39, II Samuel 5:6-12

The city of David

We had a wonderful experience this past weekend with our session leadership as we went to the mountaintop on our retreat. The main purpose of the retreat was to discern God’s leadership and guidance for the church over the next year. Charlie did a great job describing that.

It was my first experience in this close proximity to so many of you in this church. I discovered things about sleeping habits and other quirky behaviors about some of you, and I’m sure you learned the same about me. But remember, what happened at Mt. Gretna…actually not really. We want to share everything about what happened at Mt. Gretna. One of the main themes that kept repeating itself was that it is only by the grace of God that we are able to do anything.

We are remaining in the Old Testament for our primary Scripture as we look at the origin of the City of David, which is also known as Jerusalem. But it isn’t just a history lesson on Jerusalem, but rather a recognition of how David was able to step back and acknowledge that it was not by might, not by power, but by the presence of the Lord.

**READ**

Our last three days in Israel we spent in Jerusalem. We were driving from the Dead Sea area and the sun was just beginning to set, but it was still bright enough. I was sitting in the front of the bus and I saw the driver put a CD in as we were entering a tunnel and when we came out there right in front of us was the city of Jerusalem on a hill. The speakers simultaneously blasted the song Jerusalem and the driver and the guide, who was a tank battalion commander, were belting out the song as if there were not tomorrow…and they had tears in their eyes.

I knew, of course, the Scriptures where Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and what we read earlier today is its twin in Matthew. They are both so emotional because Jesus loves this city of Jerusalem. In these verses that we read earlier he wants to be able to embrace it and protect it. There is something about this city that I had read over and over again but had not really understood the depth of that love. But somehow there on this bus with these two grown men singing Jerusalem with tears in their eyes, it made a little more sense.

A few days later we went out on an early morning run from our hotel to the main gates of the city and we saw the still remaining bullet holes from who knows which aggression and battle.

The ancient Jerusalem seemed to be completely intertwined with the new. While currently you have two different sectarian Christian groups, Jewish and Muslim populations living in that city, it is anything but peaceful.

Someone after church last week mentioned that a number of you in a small group had been discussing whether it was appropriate to pray for peace in Jerusalem. Now the obvious answer is that, of course it is. But it goes much deeper than that. We just have to remember that when we do pray for peace in Jerusalem we are in essence asking for Jesus Christ to come back. We know that according to Scripture there will be peace in Jerusalem only when Christ comes back. So please pray for peace in Jerusalem and yes pray for the sake of the people living in Jerusalem that are real people who suffer every day, but know that when you pray for peace in Jerusalem, you are praying for Jesus Christ to come back. So, nothing wrong there.

Our first Scripture today depicts Jesus teaching and to his disciples when he basically seems to cast a very negative prophecy on the city of Jerusalem. He expresses his love for the city by using the figure of a mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings. But it is a desperate plea for Jerusalem to turn its eyes toward God once again. I heard that in this area there is a church fasting for our country to turn its way around.

It really is the only analogy I could think of as a comparison. Many of us love our country to the point of wanting to protect it and keep it from going down a path that seems to inevitably lead to destruction. Jesus sees Jerusalem and it seems that he had given up on her. He states that Jerusalem will not see him again until its people say: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”.

Look at 21:9. Palm Sunday and the call to Christ has already happened. Jesus says Jerusalem, you will not rise up again until I come back again. Jesus recognizes that the people had turned their back to God.

One of the most powerful scenes I experienced in Israel was making my way down to the wailing wall. It’s the outer wall that signifies to the Jewish people the outer wall of the temple. People go to pray there. And they weep. And they weep because the loss of Jerusalem. Because they had not been faithful enough to God for Jerusalem to survive.

And that takes us to the underlining point of this sermon which is that when we recognize our reliance upon God, God will know that. God is always undergirding our every step, but actually being able to claim that and base our life around that is another issue.

While I was in Florida I had a very good friend who was a pastor down the road and over the bridge and he was a very good pastor. He took a small country church and grew it into over 600 people worshipping on 4 services on Sunday. Two years ago while I was in Moscow he was pulled over and charged with DUI. That evening he wanted to commit suicide. He was a pastor, newly elected to the school board, at the zenith of his life.

He had built his kingdom in that church. When I spoke to him after this happened he said, Bob, I thought I had done all of this. Sure, I gave God the glory and did that humility thing, but I always thought that I had done this. Then the next day it all came crashing down.

We find ourselves at the beginning of David’s time as King of Israel. The verse before these we find he becomes King when he was 30 and served until he was 70. We find that here in these verses David had a sincere heart for God. He went up against the Jebusites who are simply the Canaanites who were the people of the land and conquered them by climbing up the water shaft. Now remember that water shaft because in a few weeks I’m going to say something more about that.

But look at the haughtiness of the Jebusites. This is nothing more than trash talking that today would not be acceptable. Don’t take it literally that David hated the blind and the lame or that he actually targeted them in some cruel non politically correct move to conquer the city. But God delivers the Jebusites into the hands of David and then we read in vs. 12, which is the key verse, David then…read the verse. It is here and underlined here that David recognizes for the first time that it was the Lord who made it happen.

We know from vs. 10 already that it was the Lord. We know, the reader, the one looking in, but David first comes to the realization only now. The recognition and the acceptance of God’s motivational pressure in our lives is key. The recognition of our frailty is equally important.

You need to hear me now, I don’t care how successful you are or you think you are, in an instant God can bring you down if you don’t acknowledge all that He has done for you. I don’t know anything about Joe Paterno’s spiritual condition or his relationship to Jesus Christ, but he does serve as a tremendous example for all of us how quickly things can change in our lives and how that change can then not only impact us but those all around us. Even David himself only 6 chapters later David’s perfectly constructed world would come crashing down. But likewise, I don’t care how big of a loser you think you are, if you put your hand in the and of the man who walked on water, you can do anything that he sets you to do. Anything.

That brings us to First Presbyterian, not the loser part, but the part where with one leader we are able to see how God is able to use him to establish a kingdom that would build the temple, God’s temple and be declared the people of God.

Leaders at First Presbyterian, this is your church. Members of 1st Presbyterian, this is your church. Turn to your neighbor and say, this is my church. So if your claim this church as your own, you had better claim Almighty God as your own. So, turn to your neighbor and say, Jesus is my God.

We have plans that we believe are God’s plans for this church. They were bathed in prayer. We have people here who are determined to ensure that God’s will be done at this church. So let us determine today that our church will always give God the glory and honor so He can build up His kingdom through us. Amen.