

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 3 August 2025. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **The Desolate House**

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

A sight that has always made me sad is that of old, abandoned houses. Years ago, as I was travelling on deputation in America, I drove countless miles through the farmlands of the Midwest; and along the way I would often see old, dilapidated, Victorian-era farmhouses. As I looked at the wrap-around porches that were now sunken in, I imagined what they would have looked like “back in the day,” when parents and grandparents were sitting in their rocking chairs on the porch on summer evenings, and when kids were running around in the yard, and catching fireflies. On winter afternoons, as twilight was setting in, and the ground was dusted with snow, I often looked at the darkened windows of those old houses, and wondered what it would have looked like on Thanksgiving Day one hundred twenty years ago, when the windows were aglow with the light of gas lamps, and the blazing hearth. I envisioned the family laughing, singing, and feasting around the table; and I thought how sad it was that that house was now empty and cold. Likewise, in my years here in Ireland, I have often seen the shell of old stone cottages, their thatched roofs long rotted away, and their windows broken. When I see those old cottages, I often imagine what it would have been like when a family of twelve was crowded around the hearth, and a kettle was hanging over the fire; and I imagine the mum spinning wool, and the father telling old Irish tales to his family. At one time, old cottages such as these were full of life; but now, they are vacant.

So, what’s my point? I am trying to convey the profound sadness that *God* must have felt when He had to abandon *His* House. You see, there is a House that *God* once called His own; and that house, which was once filled with life and song, is now desolate, with only small traces of its walls still standing. Imagine *God’s* House—that magnificent Temple on top of Mount Zion—glistening in the sunlight, with its gold and white marble. Imagine great crowds of Jewish people gathered in the enormous courtyard of the Temple. Imagine the smoke billowing up from the huge altar of sacrifice; and imagine the festive feeling in the air, as the people waved palm branches and sang “*Annah, Yehovah, hoshiah-nah; annah, Yehovah, hatzliachah-nah*” (“Save now, I beseech thee, O Jehovah; O Jehovah, I beseech thee, send prosperity”). But then, imagine that great House being levelled to the ground, and burned with fire; and imagine all the worshippers being slaughtered, and their bodies left in heaps—and all the survivors being abducted, and sold into slavery. *That* is what happened nearly 2,000 years ago; and it was *that* event which caused our Lord to cry and sob, forty years before it even happened.

This morning, we will see why *God’s* house, where He had once met with *His* family, the people Israel, had to be left desolate. However, we will also see that that House will be *built again* one day, and will be filled with life and joy. We will also see how *our* houses, which have been desolated by sin, can be filled with the life of God. The title of this message is ***The Desolate House***.

Read Matthew 23:34-39.

# I. Christ's accusation against Israel (vv. 34-36)

In the last several weeks, as I've been preaching through **Matthew 23**, we've examined the eight indictments that Jesus pronounced on the Pharisees. Eight times Jesus pronounced "woe" upon these hypocritical men, who outwardly looked religious and beautiful, but who were inwardly filled with lies and moral corruption. Not only that, but Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees were now following in the footsteps of their forefathers, who had been guilty of murdering God's prophets. Let's read those verses again. (**Read Matthew 23:29-33.**)

Even as Jesus was speaking, the Pharisees were preparing to "fill up the measure of their fathers." In other words, just as their forefathers had filled their "cup" of iniquity with the blood of God's prophets, so the Pharisees were now about to fill up *their* cup of iniquity with the blood of *Christ's* prophets and wise men. **John the Baptist** had *already* been murdered; and though King Herod was the one who murdered him, the Pharisees had been guilty of murdering John in their *hearts*. But now, their murderous thoughts was about to turn into actual *deeds*. Only a few days later, they would murder **Christ Himself**, just outside the walls of Jerusalem. Then, only a few weeks after Christ's crucifixion, they would scourge and imprison Christ's Apostles, right there in Jerusalem. About a year later, they would murder a deacon of the Jerusalem church, named **Stephen**; and from there, the floodgates of murder were opened up, as multitudes of believers in Jesus were put on trial, and stoned to death. About ten years later (in A.D. 42), King Herod ordered the execution of the **Apostle James**, with the encouragement of the religious leaders; and only eight years before the destruction of the Temple (in A.D. 62), the religious rulers murdered **James**, the half-brother of Jesus, right there in the Temple. Countless other believers in Christ were executed in Jerusalem, as well.

Christ knew that murder was in these men's hearts; and for that reason, you'd *think* that He would not have offered them any mercy. You'd *think* that after delivering those scathing "woes" to the Pharisees, Jesus would have wrapped it up by saying, "Therefore I will *not* send you any more prophets! You've blown it; and your doom is sealed!" Yet, that is *not* what Jesus said. He said, "**Wherefore, I send unto you prophets.**" Even though Jesus knew that the religious rulers would murder His own Apostles, prophets, and wise men, He sent them anyway, to proclaim the Gospel to them! Most of the Pharisees still rejected Jesus, even after seeing the incredible miracles that God did through His Apostles. Yet, we do know, from the book of **Acts**, that there *were* many priests and Pharisees who finally believed on Jesus. My friends, this goes to show how amazing the grace of Jesus really is! Do *you* think you've blown it, and that God couldn't possibly forgive you and save you, after what *you've* done? If so, think again! Jesus is able and willing to save you. The Bible says that Christ is able to "**save them to the uttermost that come unto God by**

**him.”** There is nothing you’ve done that He won’t forgive, if you will come to Him in simple faith and repentance.

Now, let’s look again at **verse 35. (Read Matthew 23:35.)** This is a fearful statement, is it not? Not only was Jesus holding the Pharisees responsible for all the murder that *they* would commit in the coming years, but He seemed to be holding them responsible for *all* the murder of *all* God’s people, all the way back to the beginning of the world! Jesus said that all the blood from **“Abel”** to **“Zacharias son of Barachias”** would come upon that current generation. **Abel**, of course, was the very first man who was ever murdered for his faith in God; and the record of his death can be found in the first book of the Bible. As for **Zacharias, the son of Barachias**, he was murdered by King Joash, around the year 850 B.C.: and his “crime” was that he stood up before the people and said: ***“Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you.”*** For uttering those words, he was stoned to death, right there in the Temple courtyard. Though Zacharias certainly was not the last believer in Old Testament times to suffer martyrdom, the record of his death is found in **2 Chronicles**—which, in the Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament, happens to be the *last* book. Let’s take a look at those two records.

**Read Genesis 4:3-10.**

**Read 2 Chronicles 24:17-22.**

Do you see what Jesus is saying? He is saying that from the *first* book to the *last* book of the Old Testament, *all* the blood of *all* the righteous men who had died for the LORD would be held to the account of that current generation. By the way, there are some who believe that Jesus was speaking not only of the Zacharias who died in Joash’s day, but also of *another* Zacharias who would be murdered 40 years later. Shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, a believer named **Zacharias, the son of Baruch** was killed for his faith in Christ, right there in the Temple.<sup>1</sup> It may be that Jesus was prophesying of his death, as well.

Now, this begs a question: Why was all the blood of all the past generations placed on the Pharisees? Jesus seemed to be holding them accountable not only for the blood of all the past generations of *Jews*, but for the blood of all the *Gentiles*, as well. Why would God hold the Jews of Jesus’ day accountable for the blood of Abel, who had lived and died about 2,600 years before there even *was* a nation of Israel? Doesn’t the Bible say that each person is responsible for his *own* sin? Yes, it does. In the Law, God said that a son was not to be put to death for the sin of his father,

nor the father for the sin of his son, but every man was to die for his *own* sin. Why, then, did Jesus say this? What did He mean?

Well, to the “rational” Western mind, this is hard to swallow: but there *is* a sense in which we are accountable for the sins of our fathers—if we continue to commit the same sins that our fathers committed, and refuse to repent of them. Secondly, Jesus is saying that the judgment that was coming on Jerusalem would be so swift, and so horrible, and so severe, that it would seem as though *all* the blood of every martyr of the past—both of Jews and non-Jews, from the beginning of the world—had come crashing down on *that* generation. Many of the people to whom Jesus was speaking would live to see that horrible day when Jerusalem would be destroyed, and when all her inhabitants would be scattered far and wide.

My friends, God doesn’t play games. God sees crimes that were committed 1,000 years ago as though they had just happened. That is why God held **the Canaanites** of Joshua’s day responsible for the crimes that their forefathers had been committing for hundreds of years; and He used Joshua to execute His wrath upon them. That is why God held **the Amalekites** of Saul’s day responsible for the crime that their fathers had committed against Israel 400 years earlier. By not repenting of their forefathers’ sin, the Amalekites participated in it. That is also why, during the future Tribulation period, God will bring terrible judgment upon the **religious “Babylon”** (the one-world apostate religion that will be formed during that time). This great religious “whore” will be judged not only for her *current* murders, but for the blood of *all* the saints who had died at the hands of pagan Rome, and of the Roman Catholic Church, and of the Muslim caliphates, and of *all* the antichrist religions that have ever shed the blood of God’s servants. By the way, you’ll notice that Jesus said, **“*I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes.*”** Jesus was claiming to be the One who would send prophets and wise men to the nation of Israel. Now, the last time I checked, commissioning and sending prophets is *God’s* business! It is Jehovah who said to the prophet Isaiah, **“*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*”** It was the Triune God who spoke those words, **“*Who will go for us?*”** By claiming to send prophets to Israel, Jesus was claiming to be the *God* of Israel.

Israel was rejecting their own God; and they would pay an awful price for it. But what was *God’s* response to their rejection of Him? God *does* have feelings, you know; and His feelings are well demonstrated in the coming verses. This brings us to point number two.

## II. Christ’s anguish for Israel (vv. 37-39)

**(Read Matthew 23:37-39 again.)** Brethren, do you hear the bitter anguish in Jesus’ voice? He didn’t merely wipe away a tear or two. He didn’t merely get “choked up” for a few seconds, and then move on. No, His heart was breaking for the people

whom He had to condemn. He was *crying* for them in the same way that a mother would cry over a child who has rejected her love, ignored all her warnings, and gotten himself killed because of his foolishness. The Greek word that is used in **Luke** is *klaio*, which means “to mourn, sob, or wail aloud.” Jesus was *loudly* wailing over Jerusalem. In **Luke 19:41**, where we are told that Jesus ***“beheld the city, and wept over it.”***

### **Read Luke 19:41-44.**

Brethren, there is nothing shameful or embarrassing about weeping over sin. Jesus said, ***“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*** We should mourn over our *own* sins, and over the sins of others. When was the last time you mourned over the sins of others around you—or of a nation? I will be the first to admit that I don’t mourn nearly enough for this country, nor for my original home country: however, I can say that this past January, when my family was watching the Inaugural Address of the President of the United States, I did weep hard. Before the Inaugural Address, as all the guests were flowing into the rotunda, traditional hymns such as “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” were being played; and it seemed that for once, God was being honoured by a leader of my nation. However, during the Inaugural Address, God’s name was used only as a formality. The speech was filled with bragging about America’s greatness, and about the president’s own greatness; but there was no mention of God’s justice, nor of His anger against our national sins, nor of America’s great need to repent and turn to God. As I thought about America’s murder of millions of unborn babies, and about their flaunting of every kind of sexual perversion imaginable, and of her open mockery of the Lord Jesus Christ in the courtrooms, in the classrooms, in the cinemas, and in the homes, I began to tear up. I could sense that “Ichabod”—“The glory is departed”—was written upon my country. After the address was over, I led my family in prayer; but as I prayed, I could barely speak, because I was now sobbing uncontrollably. I could sense that great judgment is coming on the land which I still love; and I couldn’t hold back my grief.

That is what it was like for Jesus—except that His grief far exceeded mine. Jesus’ words were much like *King David’s* words, when he mourned over the death of his rebellious son Absalom. David wept uncontrollably as he cried, ***“O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!”*** David *really* wished that he could have died in the place of his son; but he couldn’t. In contrast, Jesus *actually* died in the place of His people, Israel; yet, Jesus knew that very few people would believe on Him, even after He had laid down His life for them.

By weeping over Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel, Jesus was weeping over the whole nation. As a nation, Israel had willfully rejected their Messiah. It was Christ’s

will to gather the people of Israel to Himself, just as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings; but they weren't having it. They were stubborn and rebellious, and refused to be gathered. They **"would not"** receive Him; and therefore, Jesus said they "will not" see His face again until the day when they, as a nation, finally say, **"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."** By the way, that word **"not"** is a double negative. It's like saying, "not, not." In the strongest terms, Jesus was saying that "There is no way" that He will return to Jerusalem until the people of Jerusalem repent. The very name "Jerusalem" means "founded in peace"; yet, in the last 2,000 years, peace has rarely been known in Jerusalem. Why? Because there is no peace to the wicked. In Jerusalem, the Son of God was sentenced to death; and in Jerusalem many prophets and wise men have been slain. How, then, can there be peace in Jerusalem, when there has been no national repentance, mourning over sin, and turning to Christ?

Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, God declared that the Messiah will bring peace, rest, and blessing to Israel. What, then, would Messiah's *withdrawal* from Israel signify? Judgment! In the book of **Hosea**, the LORD said, **"For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him. I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early."** Like a Lion, Christ has "torn" His own people Israel, and has gone away from them; and He will return to them *only* when they acknowledge Him, and repent, and seek His face. This reminds me of a tradition that the Jewish people have been doing during the Passover night for centuries. They don't know when, or why, this tradition began; but they do it faithfully every year. At the beginning of the Passover meal, the head of the house brings out a bag called *matza tash*; and in this bag are three compartments. The father puts a piece of matza bread in each of the three compartments; and then he takes the *matza* out of the middle compartment, and breaks it. He then takes that broken *matza*, and puts it into another bag called *afikoman* (which literally means "I came"). He then hides the *afikoman* bag somewhere in the house, and encourages the children to look for it; and if it is not found, he later takes it out of its hiding place. And guess when he reveals the second piece of *matza* bread? When the family drinks from the *third* cup of grape juice—which they call the "cup of redemption"!

To this day, Jesus is "hidden" to most of the Jewish people. As a nation, they have rejected their Passover Lamb. Therefore, Christ has "torn" them, and left them. In A.D. 70, He allowed the beautiful House, in which he had once met with His people, to be destroyed by the Romans; and He has gone away, and returned to His "place" in Heaven. For now, the greater part of the Jewish nation still refuses to see Jesus as their Messiah; yet, every year at Passover, the Afikomen bread points to Him! Just as the second piece of bread in the *matza tash* bag is broken on Passover Day, so Christ, the second member of the Triune Godhead, was broken for us on Passover Day; and He is now "hidden away" in Heaven. For now, the nation of Israel

cannot find their Messiah; but one day, they will finally acknowledge their offence against the LORD, and seek His face. In that day, they will find Jesus to be not only the Bread of Life who was broken for them, but the Passover Lamb, who came to them **“in the name of the Lord”**; and they will declare it with their whole heart and soul. They will bless their Messiah; and Christ, in turn, will bless *them*. He will save them, and heal them; and He will literally “return” to them, and set up his glorious Kingdom on earth. He will rebuild the Temple, and sit on His throne in that Temple, and will reign over the whole world for 1,000 years.

### **Read Psalm 118:21-26.**

At the moment when Christ gave up His life on the cross, the thick veil in the Temple was torn in half. This was the Father’s way of letting Israel know that His Son had just opened the way to Heaven through His death on the cross, and that no more animal sacrifices were needed. From that moment onward, strange things began to happen in the Temple. For example, every year on the Day of Atonement, the priests would cast lots over two goats. One of these two goats was called **“the LORD’s” goat**; and it was sacrificed on the altar, as an atonement for the sins of the nation. The other goat was called **“the scapegoat”**; and the sins of the nation were symbolically placed on this goat. This goat was then led away out the Temple, into the wilderness. This was to show that Israel’s sins had been taken away from God’s sight, and that God had accepted them.

### **Read Leviticus 16:1-10, 20-22.**

What we’ve just read is the command that God gave to Israel for the Day of Atonement. However, there were some *traditions* that developed around the Day of Atonement; and it seems that God acknowledged these traditions. One tradition is that the priests would **tie a red ribbon** around the horn of the **scapegoat**; and they would also tie a red ribbon around the throat of the **LORD’s goat**. However, that ribbon on the scapegoat’s horn didn’t *stay* red. According to the Talmud, as well as the records of Josephus, that red sash on the scapegoat’s horn always miraculously turned *white* just after the LORD’s goat had been sacrificed on the altar! The Jews also had a tradition of tying a red sash on the **door of the Temple** on the Day of Atonement; and every year, that sash turned white! The Jews understood this to mean that their sins had been made white as snow, and that God had accepted their nation.

But here’s the rub: according to ancient Jewish records, that red sash on the goat’s horn, *and* the sash on the Temple door, did *not* turn white for the last forty years before the Temple was destroyed! But that’s not all. According to another tradition,

it was a bad sign for the LORD's lot to fall to the goat on the high priest's **left hand**. Well, guess what? For the *last forty years* before the destruction of the Temple, the lot *always* fell to the goat on the priest's left hand! Not only that, but during those last forty years, the **two enormous doors** of the Temple (which took twenty men to close) kept swinging open from time to time. Also, **the western-most lamp** in the Holy Place would never stay lit. Now, what did all these ill omens mean? What had happened forty years prior to the destruction of the Temple, which incurred God's disfavour upon Israel? It's simple: Israel had rejected their Messiah when He was among them! The Lord's House continued to stand for another 40 years after Christ went back to Heaven; but it was already desolate, because Israel's *God* was no longer among them.

This reminds me of an old American folk song called "**The Vacant Chair**." This song was written in memory of **John William Grout**, who died in the American Civil War in the year 1861, shortly before the Thanksgiving Day. In the song, the family members are gathering for Thanksgiving Day in gloom, as they remember that "vacant chair" in which their noble Willy had once sat. They sang, "We shall meet, but we shall miss him; there will be one vacant chair; we shall linger to caress him while we breathe our evening prayer." Though they were still meeting together in the house for Thanksgiving, and though they were still singing the old songs, and saying their prayers, their loved one was dead; and the fact that Willie was dead made the house seem "dead" and empty. Similarly, Israel's God was "dead" to them, because they had rejected their Messiah. Yes, they still met in God's House; but the House was empty, because God had removed His presence from them. Of course, God was not dead: He had simply moved to another "House"—the spiritual House of the local church, which Christ had established while He was here on earth. Yet, the Jewish people didn't really notice, because they didn't even know their God. Though they were uneasily aware that something was amiss, they refused to believe that their God was really gone. Their God had been among them 40 years earlier, in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth: yet, they themselves had killed Him!

The Lord's heart was breaking as He informed Jerusalem that their House was left to them desolate. However, He did not leave them without hope. He said, "**Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.**" That word "**till**" is important! It means that God has not abandoned Israel forever! There *will* be a day when Israel will say of Jesus, "**Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.**" During the fiery judgments of the seven-year Tribulation period, Israel will finally realise that Jesus is their true Messiah, and will believe on Him in droves!

**Read Zechariah 12:10-14.**



On the day when Christ returns to earth, Israel will mourn for Him as though they were mourning for a son who had died. Of course, Jesus is *not* dead: He is alive forevermore. As we speak, He is sitting in *His* “chair,” in the Father’s House in Heaven. Nevertheless, Israel will mourn when they realise that *they*, as a *nation*, once killed God’s beloved Son, and their beloved Brother. Those Jews who rejected Christ during the Tribulation will mourn when they realise that they are about to be judged by their Messiah, and sentenced to hell; and those who did believe on Him will mourn that had rejected Him for so long. It will be a day of mourning and regret; but it will also be a day of great hope and joy for the now redeemed house of Israel; and they will enter into the wonderful Kingdom that Christ has promised them.

**Conclusion:** Now, as far as I know, none of us here this morning is of Jewish stock; but don’t think for one minute that this Scripture does not apply to us! You see, we must repent and seek the Lord, too. Isaiah said, ***“Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”*** Until you come to know Christ, the “house” of *your* body will remain desolate. Until you seek the Lord, and find Him, there is an emptiness in your life that nothing in this world can fill. The actor **Shia LaBeouf** once admitted, in an interview, that there was a **“God-sized hole”** in his life, which no amount of money or fame seemed to be able to fill. Perhaps you know exactly what I’m talking about, because *you* have a “God-sized hole” that *you* are trying to fill, too. If so, what are you waiting for? Let *God* fill that hole! Let Christ come into your heart! He died for you, and paid the price for your sins, so that you might have eternal life. However, you must *want* Christ to come into your life. By faith, you must *ask* Him to come in. In your heart, turn from your sin, and believe that what Jesus did on that cross is all you need. Believe on Him, and you will be saved today! And if you are saved already, don’t ever forget that the “house” of *your* body is not your own. You are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. V (United States: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991), p. 277.