

**Sermon Title:** The New Jerusalem  
**Preacher:** Rev Stu Cameron  
**Date and Time:** 28 March, 2010 – 7.30am, 9am and 10.45am  
**Location:** Newlife Uniting Church - Robina

Jesus had traveled to Jerusalem before. As a boy he journeyed to the city with his family for various feasts and celebrations. During his public ministry he performed miracles in Jerusalem and had numerous confrontations with the political and religious leaders of the city. But this time was different. The hour for his glorification was drawing near. The stage was set.

And so Jesus travels one last time from his home base in Galilee south towards Jerusalem. For three tumultuous years he has taught with authority, healed miraculously, delivered demons and proclaimed the kingdom of God. As he journeys his reputation precedes him. He comes to the outskirts of Jerusalem and stand atop the Mount of Olives, gazing westward towards the city. The crowds are gathering and Jesus sends two of his disciples ahead to obtain an un-ridden colt on which he then winds his way down the steep road towards the city walls. The Passover crowds are two, three, four deep all trying to catch a glimpse of the man everyone is talking about. It's like a grand final parade. The crowd cries out in praise and expectation with the words of messianic hope:

*Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!*  
(Luke 19:38)

Some religious people are incensed. Some Pharisees demand the Jesus put an end to this sacrilegious display. With the mammoth stones of the temple mount and city walls in front of him, Jesus responds with his own rebuke:

*I tell you...if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out. (Luke 19:40)*

The parade continues. The crowds are thicker and louder. The walls of the city loom large as the procession reaches the Kidron valley. Jesus stops. Luke recounts what happens next:

*As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come on you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.'* (Luke 19:41-44)

Jesus weeps over the city. He weeps over its rebellious past- and prophetically he laments its tragic future. He who is of the line of David weeps over the City of David.

Since the time of David, Jerusalem had been the heart of Jewish faith and national identity. It was the city of pilgrimage, the city of worship and the city of hope. It had, and has, an almost mystical hold over the collective psyche of the Jewish people. The Jewish Talmud says of Jerusalem:

*Ten measures of beauty descended to the world, nine were taken by Jerusalem.*  
(Talmud, Kiddushin 49b)

Jewish tradition argues that Jerusalem was a Holy Place long before it became the City of David. In around 2000BC, Abraham, the Father of the nation of Israel was commanded by God to take his son Isaac to the region of Moriah where he was to sacrifice him on a mountain. That mountain is identified by Orthodox Jews this to this day as the Temple Mount, and the rock on which Abraham was to sacrifice Isaac located on the site of the Holy of Holies, the innermost part of the Temple. The place where Abraham was tested would later become the site where the High Priest would make the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement for the sins of the whole nation.

On the map you received with your gazette, Mount Moriah, the Holy of Holies is located here.

Today that rock, Mount Moriah, is covered over by a Muslim Shrine, the Dome of the Rock.

Around 1000 years later the area around Mount Moriah had become a walled city of a Canaanite tribe called the Jebusites. During the conquest of Canaan Joshua and then others led raiding parties against the city. Finally, after assuming the throne, King David conquered the city and made it the home of the united 12 tribes, the nation of Israel (2 Samuel 5)

David fortified the walls and eventually brought into the city with great fanfare the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6) in which is the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments given to Moses and that is the symbol of God's covenant with Israel. More than that, for Israel the Ark was in a mystical way the very tangible presence of Yahweh on earth. Jerusalem was not just the City of David; it was the City of God.

Through the prophet Nathan, God says to David:

*Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever. ...I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom...forever. (2 Samuel 7:16, 12-13)*

Again, on the map you received, the City of David; the first walled city of Jerusalem is here.

David's son Solomon succeeds the throne and undertakes a seven year building program constructing the first temple, with the Ark finding a permanent home in the Holy of Holies at the heart of the temple. The reign of David and then Solomon was the political highpoint for Jerusalem and Israel. Israel's border extended south to the Sinai, north to the Euphrates river and west to the lands of the Ammorites, Edomites and Moabites. Israel, for a generation or two, was a regional superpower and Jerusalem was its capital. (1 Kings: 1-10)

But then Solomon built his palace. The temple took seven years to build; Solomon Palace took 13 years. The Palace, a monument to Solomon's power, was twice the size of the temple. Solomon married seven hundred women and had 300 concubines - most of them foreign. Under their influence he built high places and altars to foreign gods all through Israel. It was the beginning of a downhill spiral.

After Solomon's death, civil war breaks out and the kingdom is divided between the 10 tribes of the north and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the south, centered on Jerusalem. Two hundred or so years later the northern kingdom falls to Assyria and Jerusalem is surrounded on all sides by enemies. For hundreds of years God protects Jerusalem until eventually it falls to the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in the years 586BC. The city burned and was laid to waste. The temple was destroyed. The Ark of the Covenant was lost forever. All but a few of Jerusalem's inhabitants were carried off to captivity in Babylon. There the Jews mourned the loss of the temple and with it the loss of God's favor:

*By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept as we remembered Zion – If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. (Psalm 137:1, 5)*

Eventually the exiles return to Jerusalem. A second temple is slowly built. Nehemiah rebuilds the city walls and Ezra reestablishes the centrality of Torah – the law – in Jewish life. But conquest and occupation are not over for Jerusalem, nor for Israel.

In 322BC Alexander the Great conquers the city.

In 63BC the great Roman general Pompey conquers the city and much of the ancient world and Jerusalem becomes the capital of a client kingdom ruled by Herod the Great and part of the great Roman Empire. Herod had an ego, and he embarked on a massive building campaign, including a huge extension of the second temple that would take almost 100 years to complete with up to 10,000 men laboring at a time.

Temple Mount would hold hundreds of thousands of Pilgrims on high, holy days like Passover.

And so on Palm Sunday, this was the city of Jerusalem as Jesus would have experienced it.

It was a city that had a permanent population of approximately 80,000, although during celebrations like Passover this would swell by hundreds of thousands more.

Here is the original city captured by David from the Jebusites.

Above that we have the Temple Mount.

Here is the Lower City where the poor and working class lived.

And here is the Upper City where the rich lived and Herod had his palace.

This is the city Jesus weeps over.

This is not the only time Jesus has mourned over the capital of ancient Israel. Earlier in Luke Jesus says:

*O Jerusalem, 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! (Luke 13:34)*

Jesus laments the long history of Jerusalem rejecting the prophets God's sends them.

The calling of a prophet in Israel's history was a very risky profession.

For example, the prophets Naboth and Zechariah were stoned to death. (1 Kings 21, 2 Chronicles 24)

The prophet Jeremiah was thrown into a sewage pit. (Jeremiah 38)

King Ahab's wife Jezebel systematically killed hundreds of prophets as she built shrines to Asherah and Baal across the high places of Israel. (1 Kings 18)

The prophet Elijah was harassed and chased through the land, spent much of his lonely existence in the desert fed by ravens. In a land full of idols and idol worshippers, Elijah often felt he was the only one left acknowledging Yahweh. When King Ahab met Elijah he said to him:

*Is that you, you troubler of Israel? (1 Kings 18:17)*

Prophets are troublemakers.

Prophets trouble the conscience.

Prophets trouble the conscience of those who are trying to ignore God and his word, because prophets – true prophets – speak the word of God.

Time and again out of loving concern God sent Israel and Jerusalem prophets, more often than not to warn them of the consequences of their sin.

Jerusalem would cave in to the surrounding culture and worship idols rather than the one true God.

Jerusalem's rich would ignore the poor.

Jerusalem's inhabitants would reject the foreigner seeking shelter.

Jerusalem's religious leaders focused on dry religious ceremony rather than heart-felt worship.

Through the prophets God communicated his loving concern – his desire to gather the Holy City and its inhabitants under the shelter of his wings as a hen gathers chicks.

But time and again Jerusalem ignored God's word through the prophets and God's offer of sanctuary and salvation.

Jerusalem's citizens were a little like a child that desperately does not want to listen – like a toddler who closes their eyes, puts their fingers in their ears and makes noise to block out mum or dad's rebuke or request.

What has all this to do with us?

What possible relevance can ancient Jerusalem's story have for us?

As surely as God spoke to ancient Jerusalem, God speaks to us, his children, today.

And as surely as Jerusalem found creative ways to ignore God's voice, so too do we.

Often I will meet Christians who lament that God never seems to speak to them. They long for a deep mystical experience, an audible voice, a miraculous visitation to communicate God's word directly to them. Don't get me wrong, I believe that God can and does communicate in these ways, including today. But God speaks to us daily through his Word – the Word we have in scripture.

In this book we have God's word mediated through men and women of faith. Through the pages of this book we hear God speak. But how many of us are listening?

The most recent NCLS noted that of those Australians who go to church, 21 per cent read their Bible daily, 14 per cent open it a few times a week and 6 per cent once a week. But 24 per cent said they read their Bibles only occasionally, 18 per cent hardly ever and 17 per cent said they never read the Bible on their own as a private devotional activity. These are devastating figures.

One of the eight stated values of our church is scriptural discernment. We believe that:

*Centering our lives on God's written Word we will allow scripture and the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us as we encounter God's living Word (Christ).*

Jerusalem ignored God's word. Are we guilty of the same sin? Perhaps Jerusalem's story is closer to ours than we thought.

And so, if you are not in the habit of reading your bible regularly – go to the bookshop and start with Every Day with Jesus – a bible devotional. If you are not in a small group, make every effort to get in one where you can wrestle with scripture with others. The time for excuses is over.

Let's go back to that first Palm Sunday.

Jesus predicts Jerusalem destruction. He foresees the inevitable consequences of Jerusalem's failure to listen to God's word. Sin has life-denying consequences. The Apostle Paul said that the wages, or the consequences of sin, is death. And Jerusalem would suffer an agonizing death.

Thirty or so years after Palm Sunday Israel rose up against the Roman occupiers. After initial success, the Romans won the upper hand and in 70AD the Roman General Titus led 60,000 men in laying siege to Jerusalem. The situation became dire. Food and water ran out. Cannibalism was rife. People tried to escape the city but were captured and crucified with thousands of crosses ringing the hills surrounding the city.

Eventually the city was overrun. Hundreds of thousands were killed or carried off into slavery. Much of the city was burned to the ground. And, in a sad fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, Roman soldiers pushed every stone of the temple into the streets below until only the foundation stones remained.

In January I took this picture of the stones that still litter the ancient street.

The destruction of Jerusalem marked the beginning of the great Diaspora – the scattering of the Jews throughout the world. For most of the next 1800 years Jews either did not live in Jerusalem, or were a very small minority. Jerusalem would

continue to be a city of war – overrun by Persian, Turk, Muslim and Crusader armies – amongst others. In 1967 Jerusalem again became the capital of Israel when it was captured in the 6-day war.

For centuries Jews have mourned and lamented over the destruction of Jerusalem, just as their forebears did centuries before while in exile in Babylon.

For example, when a Jewish couple is married, the groom will place a tiny amount of ash on his forehead before he stands under the bridal canopy to remind him that his own rejoicing cannot be greater than the ongoing need to recall Jerusalem's destruction. Similarly, the groom will crush a glass under his shoe after the wedding, again recalling the destruction of Jerusalem. In many Jewish homes, a small part of a wall is left bare of paint to remind its inhabitants of the destruction of the Holy City. At the end of the Festival of Yom Kippur and the Passover Seder worshippers will say 'next year in Jerusalem', looking forward in anticipation to when temple worship might be restored.

While Jerusalem is now under Israeli control, religious and orthodox Jews look forward to the day when Jerusalem will be returned to her former glory - where the temple will be restored and the long-awaited Messiah will come.

I also look forward in anticipation, but for different reasons.

I look forward not for the Messiah to come, but for the Messiah to come again!

On Palm Sunday, the crowds proclaimed Jesus as the coming savior, but then turned on him within days as he failed to meet their skewed expectations. The same voices that had acclaimed Jesus with shouts of Hosanna now spat out the demand Crucify Him! I look forward to the return of the Crucified, Risen and Glorified Messiah!

We have every reason to be fascinated with the fate of Jerusalem. You see, the Bible tells us that as follower of Jesus one day, after Jesus has returned, Jerusalem will be our Eternal Home. Not the old Jerusalem - but a New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem will be our eternal postcode.

The Bible tells us clearly and unequivocally that at the end of time as we know it, heaven will come to earth.

The common view is that when we die our ultimate home is not some disembodied heaven where our soul will live in a state of bliss. The picture the Bible paints is quite different. In Revelation 21, after the traumatic events of the Last Days, the vanquishing of evil and the final judgment, Saint John paints this vivid picture:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. (Revelation 21:1-3)*

In the end, we don't go to heaven – heaven comes to us.

We pray 'your kingdom come' and one day – God's kingdom will come in all its glory!

Here is the Good News.

God has not, could not, will not give up on Jerusalem. Despite its unfaithfulness, God is faithful.

Better still, God has not, could not, will not give up on us. Despite our unfaithfulness, God is faithful and just, merciful and might, gracious and compassionate and He has in store for us a reward beyond our imagining.

The New Jerusalem will be almost incomparable to the old Jerusalem.

Through the centuries people have wept for Jerusalem – by the rivers of Babylon in ancient time to the ghettos of Europe more recently.

In the New Jerusalem we read that *God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.* (Revelation 21:4)

The foundations of the old city of Jerusalem are built on the rocky hills of Judea.

The foundations of New Jerusalem will be the foundations stones of the church, for the New Jerusalem is and will be the bride of Christ. *The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.* (Revelation 21:14)

The old city is built out of dusty, colorless sandstone.

New Jerusalem will be decorated with 12 different types of precious stones. It will be adorned with pearls and built with gold as pure as glass.

The old city has known more than millennia of war, with occasional bouts of peace. It's gates would be closed at night to guard against invasion.

New Jerusalem will be a place where the lion lays down with the lamb and where the spears are turned into pruning hooks. The gates of New Jerusalem will always be open as *the glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.* (Revelation 21:26)

The old city is baked hot in summer by the Desert Sun.

New Jerusalem *does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.* (Revelation 21:23)

Temple Mount dominated the high point of the old city, and more than that, dominate the religious, cultural and economic life of the people. It was in the Holy of Holies, the heart of the temple that the Chief Priest would enter on one day of the year to make an atoning sacrifice for the people. Here in the Holy of Holies, was God's footstool on earth.

In his vision, Saint John *did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.* (Revelation 21:22) Every citizen of New Jerusalem will bask in the full and free glow of the presence of God!

Old Jerusalem has no river, only a small spring. Water is precious and scarce.

In New Jerusalem *the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, will flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the street will stand the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree will be for the healing of the nations.* (Revelation 22:1-2)

Old Jerusalem is a city built, and re-built and re-built by the labor of human hands.

New Jerusalem is built entirely by the hand of God. The same God who says to us, behold I am making all things new!

Son on this Palm Sunday we can join with those who shouted Hosanna two thousand years ago. We do so in the sure and certain hope that the Messiah has come and the Messiah will come again! Jesus says to us on Palm Sunday in the year 2010 – the year of our Lord:

*Behold I am coming soon! Yes I am coming soon.* (Revelation 22:7, 20)