

'The Two Jerusalems'. Bethesda Evening Praise. 19 April 2009.
John 14. 2-3; 19. 17-20; Rev. 21. 2-5a; 22. 3-5a.

I want to speak this evening about two 'Jerusalems'. And I can claim to be in very good company.

The apostle Paul, for example, once wrote of the two Jerusalems – of the 'Jerusalem which now is, and ... Jerusalem which is above', Gal. 4. 25-26. For his part, the writer to the Hebrews wrote of the heavenly Jerusalem – 'you have come to Mount Zion', he said, 'and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem', Heb. 12. 22 – and would therefore no doubt have spoken in terms of the earthly Jerusalem. As we read, the apostle John spoke of 'the holy city, New Jerusalem', Rev. 21. 2, and would presumably have thought in terms of the old – the former – Jerusalem.

And, with the help of the New Testament, it is possible to trace the history of these two 'Jerusalems' from way back in the book of Genesis and through to the book of the Revelation. For example, Abraham the patriarch had links with both cities. First, he had links – admittedly rather tenuous and weak links – with the Jerusalem which now is. Following his dramatic rescue of Lot from Chedorlaomer, King of Elam, before Abraham faced temptation in the person of Bera, King of Sodom, he was met by Melchizedek, who is described, not only as 'priest of the Most High God', but as 'king of Salem', Gen. 14. 18; Heb. 7. 1-2 (twice) – which we know is one and the same as Jerusalem; 'In Salem is His tabernacle, and His dwelling place in Zion' in Jerusalem, Psa. 76. 2 (a Psalm of Asaph). But Abraham had much stronger links with the Jerusalem which is above.

Hebrews 11 tells us that, '*By faith he (Abraham) sojourned in ('dwelt in') the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he looked for (he 'waited for') the city which has foundations, whose builder ('technician' – designer, architect) and maker is God*', vv. 9-10.

Moving forward from the beginning of the Bible to the end, the book of the Revelation also mentions both Jerusalems. In that sense, I suppose you could say it is, to borrow the words of Charles Dickens, 'A Tale of Two Cities'. Interestingly, John does not call the earthly Jerusalem by its name – reserving the name 'Jerusalem' for the *New Jerusalem* (the 'Revised Version'), Rev. 3. 12 (the promise to the overcomers in the church at Philadelphia); Rev. 21. 2, 10. The apostle describes the *earthly* Jerusalem as 'the great city which spiritually is called Sodom (the place notorious for filth and corruption) and Egypt (the place notorious for opposition and persecution), where also our Lord was crucified', Rev. 11. 8. We know then that John is referring to Jerusalem, because the city is clearly identified as the place where the Lord Jesus was 'crucified'.

And the fact that He was crucified there suggests many ideas to me. First, and put at its simplest, I might say that *the Lord Jesus went once to the Jerusalem which now is – to the earthly Jerusalem – that I might go forever to the Jerusalem which is above* – that I might have a part and a place in the heavenly Jerusalem. More accurately – more precisely – I should say that *He went once to a 'place' just outside the Jerusalem which now is – that I might have a 'place' forever inside the New Jerusalem*. We read that 'He, bearing His own cross, went out (of the city, that is) to a place called "of a Skull", which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him', John 19. 17-18. And, again, that 'Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross ... many of the Jews read this title, for *the place* where Jesus was crucified was near the city', John 19. 19-20. The writer to the Hebrews noted the point carefully – 'the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin (that is, the bullock and the goat on the Day of Atonement), are burned outside the camp', he wrote (referring to Lev. 16. 27), adding, 'Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate', Heb. 13. 11-12. I think of the opening words of Mrs. Alexander's great Easter hymn, 'There is a green hill far away, outside a city wall'.

So the Lord Jesus went to a place a little way outside the Jerusalem which now is. But, because of what He suffered there, He has secured for me a place inside the Jerusalem which is above.

We are probably familiar with His soul-stirring words in John 14, 'In My Father's house are many mansions ('many dwelling-places, abodes'). If it were not so, I would have told you. For I go to prepare *a place* for you. And if I go and prepare *a place* for you, I will come again and receive you to myself', John 14. 2-3. So, if we read of a 'place' twice in John 19, we do also in John 14. In John 2, our Lord had earlier used the expression 'My Father's house' to describe the temple in the earthly Jerusalem. There the operative – the key – word was 'out' – 'He found in the temple those who sold oxen, sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all *out* of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured *out* the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, Take these things *out*! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!', John 2. 14-16. 'Out ... out ... out!'

But, if in chapter 2 the key word is 'out', in chapter 14 the key word is 'in'; 'In my Father's house'. And, interestingly, Jesus spoke to His disciples of going to prepare *a place for them* when He was in *the place* which *they* had just prepared *for Him*. In – not John – but Mark 14, we read, 'He sent two of his disciples, and said to them, Go (note the word) into the city, and a man carrying a pitcher of water will meet you. Follow him. And wherever he enters, say to the householder ... The Teacher says, Where is the guest room, in which I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'

And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there *prepare* (the same word as in John 14) for us. And the disciples went out and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they *prepared* (the same word again) the Passover', vv. 13-16. It was therefore in the 'place' which the disciples had 'gone' to 'prepare' for Him, that He spoke of 'going' to 'prepare' a place for them!

As we read, the features of the heavenly city which John gives are largely negative. For this evening's meeting, I will focus on John's expression 'there shall be no more'¹ – 'there shall be no more *death*, neither *sorrow*, nor *crying*, neither shall there be any more *pain* (literally 'there shall be no more pain)', Rev. 21. 4; 'there shall be no more *curse*', 22. 3, and 'there shall be no more *night* there', 22. 5, literally. There shall be 'no more death, sorrow, crying, pain, curse or night'.

And I want to consider with you a series of contrasts between what *the Lord Jesus* experienced at the Jerusalem which *now is* and what *we* will experience in the Jerusalem which *is above* – or, more accurately, what *we* will *not* experience there.

There shall be no more death. Our destiny lies in a deathless city – a city with no obituary notices, no funeral homes or cemeteries. *But what did Jerusalem hold for the Son of man?* Listen to the words of Matthew 16; 'From that time, Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be *killed*', Matt. 16. 21. Indeed, I see this verse as something of a hinge in Matthew's gospel. I compare it with, 'From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand', 4. 17. Again, listen to our Lord's words in John 12, having just entered Jerusalem; 'I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all to myself. This He said, signifying by what *death* He would die', John 12. 32-33.

Oh yes, the Son of man knew all about death!

There shall be no more sorrow. *But what did Jerusalem hold for the Son of man?* Well did Isaiah predict, 'He is despised and rejected by men, a *man of sorrows* and acquainted with grief', Isa. 53. 3. In Gethsemane, the great storm clouds of anticipation broke in fury over His head – 'He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death', Matt. 26. 37-38. Three days before, He had said, 'Now is my soul troubled', John 12. 27. But now 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful' – is sad all around – is wrapped about with sorrow – immersed in one vast ocean of grief. 'Man of sorrows! What a name!', Philip Bliss. Our Lord could have used the words of the prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations 1, 'Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see If there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which is done to me, wherewith the Lord has inflicted me in the day of His fierce anger', v. 12.

Oh yes, the Son of man knew all about sorrow!

There shall be no more crying. *But what did Jerusalem hold for the Son of man?* The word John used in Rev. 21, translated 'crying', does not mean weeping and tears. Although our Lord was, of course, no stranger to tears. We might think of His weeping in connection with the *Jerusalem* which now is, 'As He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, If you had known, even you, in this your day, the things that make for your peace!', Luke 19. 41-42 – or in connection with *the death of Lazarus*, 'When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in spirit and was troubled. And He said, Where have you laid him? They said to Him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept', John 11. 35. But I note that His 'crying' is distinguished from His tears in Heb. 5. 7 – 'Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications (petitions), with strong (vehement) *crying* and *tears* to Him who was able to save Him from ('out of') death ...'.² The word John uses here in Rev. 21. 4 – and which the writer to the Hebrews uses in chapter 5 verse 7, means to '*utter* a cry – to cry out'.

We find that, *in Gethsemane*, the Lord Jesus cried, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me' – as He recoiled from what that cup contained for Him, Matt. 26. 39. And we read that, *at the cross*, 'about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is, My God, My God, why did you forsake me?', v. 46. And so we find that He cried 'My Father' in Gethsemane and 'My God' at Golgotha.

Oh yes, the Son of man knew all about crying!

There shall be no more pain. *But what did Jerusalem hold for the Son of man?* Again, I hear the words of Mrs. Alexander's hymn, 'We may not know; we cannot tell what *pains* He had to bear'. Just think of what the Lord Jesus endured on the physical, human level before *Caiaphas* – 'The high priest said to him, I adjure you by the living God that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said to him, You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of "Power", and coming on the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his garments, saying, He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy! What do you think? They answered and said, He deserves to die. Then they spat in His face and buffeted Him ('they struck Him with their fists, with their clenched hands'); and they slapped Him, saying, Prophesy to us, Christ! Who is it that struck you?', Matt. 26. 63-68. And, make no mistake, He felt their blows keenly.

And think of what He endured before *Pilate* – of the pain He suffered from the crown of thorns, pounded down on to His head by the reed-sceptre – think of the pain He suffered from the scourge – which left His back a mass of bleeding flesh. And remember that He had refused the drugged wine ('mingled with gall') which had been offered to Him, and which would have deadened the pain, Matt. 27. 34. And what of the 7-8 inch spikes which men smashed through His hands and feet? Do you think He didn't feel them? And yet all these were as nothing compared with the wrath and judgement of God He endured when He bore our sins – when He suffered, not *from* men, but *for* men ... when He suffered for you and me.

Oh yes, the Son of man knew all about pain!

There shall be no more curse. Interestingly, the word 'curse' is the last word of the *Old Testament* – both in English and Hebrew – 'He (the 'Elijah' who would come) will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse', Mal. 4. 6.³ But God would not sign off the *New Testament* until He had given His people the assurance that the day would come when there would 'be no more curse'. *But what did Jerusalem hold for the Son of man?* Listen to Paul in Galatians 3; 'As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them (Deut. 27. 26 – no hope for us there – the standard set by God's law is far too high. But ...) ... Christ', Paul continued, 'has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree (Deut. 21. 23) ... that the blessing promised to and through Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus', Gal. 3. 10-14. Moses once reminded Israel of the time the Moabites 'hired against you Balaam the son of Beor ... to curse you. But the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam, and the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loved you', Deut. 23. 4-5; cf. Neh. 13. 2. And the Lord Jesus has done just that for us Gentiles – because He loved us, He has turned the curse into a blessing – but only by Himself becoming a curse for us.

Oh yes, the Son of man knew all about being made a curse.

And finally, **there shall be no more night.**⁴ I read once that this text was inscribed on the tombstone of a young blind Christian girl. Clearly it held great significance for the young girl's parents. And certainly there will be no night – or blind eyes – in the New Jerusalem. *But what did the earthly Jerusalem hold for the Son of man?* We know well the words of Mark 15: 'When the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour', Mark 15. 33. As the old hymn says, 'But none of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed; *nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through* ere He found His sheep that was lost'.

Oh yes, the Son of man knew all about being plunged into the deepest darkness – as He bore my sins.

Remember then that the Lord Jesus went once to the 'place' where He faced and endured ... death, sorrow, crying, pain, the curse and night – that we might dwell forever in the 'place' where none of these things will ever be found!

For reasons with which I won't bore you, last Monday I was reading several of Robert Browning's poems. I read his 'Home-Thoughts, from Abroad', with its opening lines, 'Oh, to be in England, now that April's there' – not that, in my patriotic view, England can improve one whit on our homeland ... and what is undoubtedly one of Mr. Browning's best known works, 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin' ... towards the end of which the lame boy (who was too late to enter the 'wondrous portal' in the mountain's side along with the other children of the town) described the 'joyous land', to which through his 'sweet, soft notes' the Piper led the children, as a place ...

*Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew,
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
And everything was strange and new;
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
And honey-bees had lost their stings,
And horses were born with eagles' wings ...*

A land where, as he said, his 'lame foot would be speedily cured'.

Beautiful words indeed ... but it is only a poem, with a moral about keeping one's promises.

But God's word assures us that there *is* a land, a city, a place which exceeds Robert Browning's wildest dreams and that there a way by which we can be sure that we will go there ... by faith in the Lord Jesus ... who went once to the Jerusalem *which now is* that there He might associate *Himself with me* and my sin and guilt ... that one day He might transport me to the Jerusalem which is above where He will associate *me with Himself in unending and undiminishing glory!*

And what an adventure that is going to be ... !

Footnotes

¹ Meaning 'no longer'.

² God saved Him from death by bringing Him out of it – 'Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from (out of) the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep', Heb. 13. 20.

³ 'Lest I come and strike the land with utter destruction'. The word translated 'a curse' in both the KJV and the NIV is a rather technical word – meaning properly to be accursed – to be doomed – to be appointed to utter destruction. This is the word used to describe the fate of the Canaanites; for example, 'of the cities of these peoples which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance, you shall let nothing that breathes remain alive, but you shall *utterly destroy* them', Deut. 20. 16-17. That is, Malachi is saying, if God's people refuse to repent and continue to resemble the Canaanites in character, far from their land being 'a delightful land', Mal. 3. 12, their land will necessarily share the fate of the land of the Canaanites in being wholly destroyed.

⁴ These words are repeated from Rev. 21. 25.