

Lent 6 / Palm Sunday / April 10, 2022

Luke 19:40

“If these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”

On Palm Sunday Jesus entered Jerusalem as Saviour and King. As the prophet Zechariah foretold seven centuries earlier, He rode on a donkey. His disciples put their outer garments upon the donkey for Him to sit and others put their cloaks on the road in front of Him. It may seem an odd thing to do, but this was another sign that He was the anointed King of Israel. When a man named Jehu was anointed king of Israel, the people responded by removing their cloaks and laying them before his path. In these ways Jesus was shown to be the Christ, the King of Israel and our Saviour. The disciples and crowd of pilgrims recognized these things and cried out, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.”

However, not everyone received these signs with joy or accepted them with faith. The chief priests and scribes were outraged at the behaviour of the disciples and crowd of pilgrims. They objected and said, “Teacher rebuke your disciples,” Jesus refused saying, “If these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” He is the King of Israel. He is our Saviour. Today we join the pilgrim crowd and celebrate His kingship. There is peace in heaven and peace in our hearts, because He died and rose for our salvation. If they could speak, the stones would cry out for joy at His salvation and call us to put our faith in Him as our God and Saviour!

What would stones say if they could speak? Although they have no voice, stones do speak. Fossils tell of creatures and plants long gone. Nothing lasts forever, not even stones! Given enough time every stone will eventually be subducted beneath the earth’s crust. Nevertheless, of all God’s creation, rocks and stones are the closest thing to eternal. Rocks and stones served as witnesses in the Old Testament. Rocks and stones marked boundaries. When Israel was established in the Promised Land, they were forbidden to move boundary stones and encroach on their neighbour’s property. When Jacob fled from the anger of his brother Esau, he camped at a certain place. During the night he dreamed of a ladder stretching between heaven and earth. In his dream the Lord promised the land upon which he slept, to him and his offspring. When Jacob awoke, he said, “This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” He called the place Bethel and set up a stone of witness.

Centuries later under the leadership of Joshua, Jacob’s descendants took possession of the Promised Land. The tribes set up stones to mark their territory. When the children of Israel were settled in the land, Joshua gathered the tribes to renew their loyalty to the covenant God had made with their ancestors at Mount Sinai. He called Israel to choose whom they would serve saying, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” The people responded saying, “We also will serve the Lord, for He is our God.”

Joshua tested their sincerity saying, “You not able to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God.” Again, the people responded in the affirmative saying, “No, but we will serve the Lord.” Joshua then set up a stone of witness saying, “Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord that He spoke to us.” The stone was a silent witness to the people’s words of allegiance and the Lord’s words of command and promise. Rocks were symbols of God’s faithfulness, enduring as the mountains! Stones were signs of God’s patience and kindness; strong and steadfast. In Psalm 18 the psalmist sang, “The Lord is my Rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation.” If the stones could speak, they would testify to us of the love and faithfulness of our God and Saviour. The rocks would tell us He is the Rock of our salvation!

What would the stones have said if they had cried out on Palm Sunday? The stones would have given witness to Israel’s faithlessness and God’s faithfulness. The stones of Jerusalem would have told how through many centuries, the descendants of Jacob gave themselves to the service of things that were not gods. They would have told how they bowed down and worshipped mute idols made of stone. They would have told of God’s patience and of the many prophets He sent to call them to faith and faithfulness. The stones would have called Israel to return to the Lord their God, for He is full of mercy and compassion. The stones would have testified to Jesus as the fullest expression of God’s mercy, in whom we have forgiveness. They would have said the Lord who had sent many prophets had now sent His Son, to be Israel’s King and our Saviour.

God came to Israel on Mount Sinai in fire, cloud and smoke. The sight was so terrifying that the people begged Moses to speak to them and not God. The Lord spoke to Israel through Moses and by him, made a covenant sealed in the blood of bulls. Moses was a man and in time he would go the way of all flesh and die. God needed something more enduring to witness to the covenant He made with Israel. He needed something made of stone to speak after

Moses was gone. God gave Israel two tablets of stone, upon which He wrote the words of the covenant, which we call the Ten Commandments.

What would the tablets of stone say about us? If they could speak, the stone tablets would testify to our sin. Upon them was written the law, which none but God's Son can fulfill. They would declare how often and easily we have broken God's law and violated His will. If the stone tablets could speak, they would tell us we need a Saviour. If the stone tablets could speak, they would show us our sin, so that through the gospel the Holy Spirit would lead us to Christ, the cornerstone of our faith. He fulfilled the law's demands and sacrificed Himself in our place. In Him we have peace with God and the peace of a good conscience in the forgiveness of sin.

People make jokes about the stone age, but structures built of stone stand the test of time. Consider the rocks at Stonehenge, or the granite blocks of the Great Pyramid of Giza. Despite their antiquity they are things of beauty! What are the most beautiful stones you have seen? The most beautiful stones in Jerusalem were the stones of the temple. The temple was the most important structure in Jerusalem. During Holy Week Jesus taught in the temple. By His wisdom, He showed Himself Son of God and heir to the eternal throne the Lord promised to one of David's descendants. King Solomon was famous for his great wisdom, by which the Lord testified to the legitimacy of his kingship. Solomon is also known for overseeing the construction of the temple, through which the Lord showed the permanency of His presence among Israel and His promise to forgive. Sacrifices were offered in the temple for the atonement of sin and the forgiveness of the people.

The Lord destroyed Solomon's Temple through the Babylonians. If those stones could speak, they would tell how Israel defiled the temple, by worshipping idols of stone. The idols were of stone, but the Lord is the Rock. He is faithful and full of forgiveness. The Lord cleansed Israel of this idolatry and returned them from captivity. Another temple was built. It wasn't much in comparison to the temple it replaced. However, as the centuries passed it was improved. It became one of the most beautiful structures in the ancient world. During Holy Week the disciples drew Jesus' attention to its beautiful stones. If the stones could speak, they would have proclaimed the glory of God in the promise of forgiveness He provided through the sacrifices offered in its sanctuary. More than this, the temple stones would have testified to the fullness of forgiveness God would provide in Jesus. He is the true temple, embodying the fulness of God in His flesh.

During Holy Week Jesus said two things about the temple and its stones. He said that a time would come when all those stones would be knocked down. The temple would be destroyed, never to rise again. He said His body would also be destroyed, to make atonement for human sin. But unlike the temple of stone, His body would rise on the third day, never to die again! The temple fulfilled the purpose for which it was made, to prepare for Jesus and the atonement He would make through the blood of His cross.

The temple is gone, but somewhere the broken stones remain. If those stones could talk, what would they say? They would tell us about Jesus and call us to put our faith in Him, as our God and Saviour. They would say He is the cornerstone of our faith, in whom we have forgiveness and through whom we have peace with the heavenly Father. He is the stone the keepers of the temple rejected, but He is the rock of salvation to all who believe. Whoever builds on Him builds on the firmest foundation. No one who trusts in Him will be put to shame. If the stones could speak, they would cry out the name of Jesus, praise Him as God and call us to put our trust in Him as Saviour. God grant this to us always. In Jesus' Name.