

## Hanover International Worship, August 16th, 2009

### “Jerusalem of Gold”

Lesson from Luke, Ch. 19, Verses 41 – 48

We have heard – and probably seen – the weeping Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, his grief about Jerusalem, his love for the city which rejects him and is tumbling into destruction. Beside this picture we shall place a song, sung by the Yemenite Jewish singer Ofra Haza, which expresses a deep and loving longing for Jerusalem: Yerushalayim shel Zahav, Jerusalem of Gold. There is the same love, the same grief. You may follow the text and you perhaps will discover allusions to the lamentations of Jeremiah or other biblical texts, for instance Psalm 137. Only three of the four verses will be sung. The last verse was added after the Six Day's War of 1967, and reflects its results.

#### The Song:

The mountain air is clear as water / The scent of pines around / Is carried on the breeze of twilight, / And tinkling bells resound.

The trees and stones there softly slumber / A dream enfolds them all / So solitary lies the city / And at its heart -- a wall.

*Oh, Jerusalem of gold, and of light and of bronze, I am the lute for all your songs.*

How empty and dry are the wells / How empty the market place / No one to visit the Temple Mound / Within the Old City

Within the caverns in the mountains / The winds are howling / And there is no one to take the road / Down to the Dead Sea, the road to Jericho.

*Oh, Jerusalem of gold...*

But as I sing to you, my city / And you with crowns adorn / I am the least of all your children / Of all the poets born.

Your name will scorch my lips for ever / Like a seraph's kiss, I'm told / If I forget thee, golden city / Jerusalem of gold.

*Oh, Jerusalem of gold...*

The wells are filled again with water / The square with joyous crowd / On the Temple Mount within the City / The shofar rings out loud.

Within the caverns in the mountains / A thousand suns will glow / We'll take the Dead Sea road together / That runs through Jericho.

*Oh, Jerusalem of gold...*

Dear Congregation, dear Sisters and Brothers!

On the slopes of the Mount of Olives Jesus is standing, weeping. Weeps about Jerusalem, holy Coty, City of God, City of David, City of the Temple. You are going to miss everything: peace, every chance, salvation. Coming events are carefully described. Easily you can imagine the details of the siege of a city in antiquity. Until the terrible end in blood, smoke and ruins. Oh Jerusalem, had you only chosen the Prince of peace... had you only listened to prophetic warnings, oh, whenever did you?

Jesus looks and weeps. The small photo you are looking at was taken through a western window of the chapel called "Dominus Fleuit" – The Lord wept, which was erected at a place where Jesus might have stood. Through the window today you recognize the golden cupola of the Dome of the Rock, the great muslimic sanctuary built on the area where Jesus saw the magnificent temple building.

Only twice in the gospels Jesus is portrayed weeping: here and in John, chapter 11, at his friend Lazarus' tomb. John tells us that the bystanders give a comment to Jesus' tears: How dearly he must have loved him! This provides us with a clue. Jesus weeps tears of grief, of love and compassion. And undoubtedly also here, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus weeps tears of grief, love and compassion. Not with Lazarus now, but with Jerusalem. Compassion with Jerusalem is part of the passion of Jesus which is going to take place in a few days only. So the passion of Jesus is going to be a part of the passion of the Jewish People. Marc Chagall, the Jewish painter, expressed just this in few works showing a crucified wearing the Jewish prayer scarf, the Tallit, around his hips. Thus he calls Jesus back into the Jewish People where Jesus belongs to.

Luke's next picture shows us Jesus speaking and acting like a prophet: cleaning the temple from money changers and sellers of animals for the offerings and sacrifices. This is a prophetic sign, a prophetic action. Probably the people liked it... Like all great temples in antiquity, also the temple in Jerusalem was a big bank combined with big business. There was profit from changing normal currency into temple shekels. The money changers took their part, part of the profit went to the temple authority – for maintenance of the building, for temple personnel and various expenses, and, we may assume, also as part of personal income to leading families. The same, of course, applied to the selling of animals needed for sacrifices. And all this well balanced system now was threatened by an obscure Galilean prophet. No wonder that High Priests, scribes and the upper class, including members of the High Council, were not amused. This disturber had to be eliminated – but there was the big problem that the crowds were listening to him eagerly, clinging to his lips.

So there is no Anti – Semitism in the gospel but we look into a deep gap within Judaism in Jesus' times. A prophet – like Isaiah, Jeremiah and the former ones – and has to be brought to silence.

Some days later things go heads over heels. Jesus enemies are successful – not "the Jews", but a small, though influential leading class. And instead of peace they choose terror. A terrorist, a person called Barnabas shall be released (as it was the habit of the Roman Governor on occasion of the feast of Passover, kind of appeasement policy), and Jesus is condemned to be crucified.

Jewish history in the first century shows that country and capital slowly slipped into the grip of Barrabas and other terrorist groups fighting the Romans and each other. What has changed since 50, 60, 70 A.D.? Finally, the terrorists take Jerusalem hostage and prevent even the slightest attempt to negotiate with the Roman Army which acts exactly as it is described in Jesus' words. Again there is a parallel between Jesus and the prophets: all of them were sober and sound political observers.

Now we have to realize that Luke is writing his gospel about 60 years after the events reported and 20 years after the Jewish War at the end of which Jerusalem and the temple remained but a smoking heap of rubble.

Jesus may have said – predicted – all that. Or Luke, the evangelist, the theologian, puts this course of events in Jesus' mouth. At any rate, Jesus is introduced and shaped as a Jewish prophet with a deep concern for Jerusalem, its population - and for God' will and love.

What are Luke's intentions? What is his background? For whom does he write his Gospel and then the Acts? Not for Christians according to later understanding. At Luke's time there is no Christian Church, not yet. But there are growing tensions between Rabbinic Judaism which we may call Jewish mainstream – and a small fraction within Judaism maintaining that this prophet Jesus of Nazareth is anointed and installed Messiah by crucifixion and resurrection... This small fraction uses houses and the temple for its meetings and devotions.

But then Jerusalem is defeated and destroyed in a combined "success" of Barabbas, similar terrorist groups and the Roman Army. The second total disaster of Judaism. The cruel question arises how to replace the temple. So the division of Jewish mainstream and the "Jesus – Jews" is accelerated, the conflict still fuelled by the destruction of the temple. What will Judaism be in the future? Who will be a Jew in the future?

When a group, a community falls apart, harsh words and enmity are to be expected. You may observe a contemporary example in the relations between Social Democrats and the "Left" – Party in Germany. In Luke's time Jews and Christians are not yet divided, but the process of dividing is to hear and to feel. It finds its expression in harsh abuses. Heretics those Jews are called who cling to Jesus as Lord and Saviour. They hit back: Synagogue of Satan is one of the ugliest insults towards Rabbinic Judaism. Again: this is not Anti – Semitism, it is a bitter conflict within Judaism. The question how to replace the temple finally is answered by the Rabbis simply with the word – and the program: "Torah", "Law", eager study of and loving work on the Holy Scriptures. Thus the law, the Prophets and the Scriptures become what the German poet Heinrich Heine ingeniously called "Tragbares Vaterland", "Portable Mother Country". Well, and all Jews confessing Jesus as Messiah came to the conclusion: Instead of the temple we place the Jewish Bible, plus faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ of God. Later this "plus" required some additions to the Hebrew Bible, which we now call the New Testament. And the readers and users of the New Testament retaliated gruesomely upon being expelled from God's people...

Through the eyes of German nor Christian Ant – Semitism Jesus' lamentations about Jerusalem only could be understood as accusation – and the conclusion was: Well, they got what they wanted, what they deserved, this stubborn rabble. This remains our Christian, our German guilt.

Jerusalem of Gold. Jerusalem through centuries remained a place of ruins. Through centuries reports written by Christian travelers to the Holy Land give this impression. Only since the Jewish immigrations since 1870 the situation improved. It is interesting that also the European nations and churches – roughly since 1840 – simultaneously developed first curiosity and then concern for Jerusalem and the Holy land. From 1840 there was an Anglo – German diocese in Jerusalem, located in the Anglican Christ Church. The city

about which Jesus had wept was extricated from being forgotten, became Israel's Capital in 1948 and simultaneously apple of discord between Israelis and Palestinians... a sad reality until this day.

Jerusalem of Gold – city with two walls now. There is the Western Wall, substructure of the Herodian Temple – and there is also a recent, cruel wall of concrete. A Wall of shelter and a wall generating fresh hatred, new terror, not suitable for creating, not at all for sustaining peace.

And finally this sad situation turns our eyes toward the longing of muslimic and Christian Palestinians for peace in and around Jerusalem. Peace in the near East only becomes possible and guaranteed when it is indivisible. When no one does injustice, injury and harm to the other. When resources stand open and are accessible for Jews and Arabs, Jews, Muslims and Christians.

If you, Jerusalem and Ramallah, Jenin and Tel Aviv, Haifa and Bethlehem, had only known what would bring you peace... how long will it remain hidden from your eyes?

And may the peace of God which exceeds all understanding, keep and preserve our hearts and minds in the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. And may this peace soon gain ground in the Near East, so that the Holy Land after all may become and remain Holy Land. Amen.

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