

# O, That You Knew the Terms of Peace!

by John Piper

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*Jesus weeps over Jerusalem's rejection of his peace proposal, but offers his terms of peace to anyone who accepts them.*

**Duration:** 28:46

**Scripture:** Matthew 23:31

**Topics:** "Gospel"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of accepting Jesus as the king of one's life. He describes Jesus entering a rebel city on a donkey, knowing that the shouts of praise are superficial. Despite this, Jesus defends the people and offers them a chance for peace. However, the preacher warns that there is a 'too late' moment for those who repeatedly refuse to come to Jesus. The sermon concludes with a story about a doctor who volunteers for a dangerous mission, highlighting the ignorance of the people in Jerusalem and the judgment that will come upon them.

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## Transcript

Lord Jesus, nothing catches you off guard, and what a precious thought that is. You are the great sovereign king over the universe, and hold us in the palm of your hand. Steady, I pray, our hearts and those who feel most anxious.

Free us from those things which would hinder our hearing of your voice this morning. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen.

I want you to try to picture something with me here. There's a young doctor who has a wife and three children, and he has volunteered to take a special six-month mission to a place where there has been an outbreak of a very unusual and deadly disease. There's a lot of hostility among the people in this place towards outsiders.

He's volunteered to take this mission because there's nobody else with his training who's willing to go, and so he goes and leaves behind the wife and the three children. And the months pass by slowly, and the kids are missing their daddy very much, and mom's trying to hold everything together and doing a valiant job of it, being mom and dad to these kids. And finally the day of the return approaches, and the kids are running around the house, daddy's coming home today, daddy's coming home today, and mom's got butterflies in her tummy, and at last the taxi pulls up in the driveway, and the kids storm out of the front

door.

Daddy's here, daddy's here, and mom comes running out with her heart beating so hard she can feel it, and the back door of the taxi opens, and dad steps out, a good bit thinner than when he left, and a big beard on his face to cover the sunken cheeks. And the kids charge at him, and he gets buried on the grass under six clinging arms and legs, and everybody gets his kiss. Finally he breaks loose, and mom gets her embrace.

Welcome home. It's good to be back. And now I want you to look into this doctor's eyes for a message, because if you can see the message in this doctor's eyes, then you'll know what Jesus was feeling when he came to Jerusalem.

What this doctor knows that his family doesn't know is that he caught the disease that he went to cure, and he has one week to live. When I was in seminary, I had a picture of Jesus on the wall in my study that was one of Rembrandt's, and I was utterly captivated by this face of Christ. Because if you covered up one eye, his face was full of joy.

There was a sparkle and hope. And if he covered up the other eye, he looked like he was about ready to cry. And if you just looked him full in the face, they were both there in a tragic and beautiful mingling of sorrow and joy.

That's the face of Jesus as he comes to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Yes, the sparkle in his eye. I am the king who come in the name of the Lord.

This is my city. These are my subjects. I'm coming home.

But no, there's the other eye that full of tears starts to overflow. There will be no rain in Jerusalem, no peace in Jerusalem, no justice in Jerusalem. I have one week to live.

Of course, there's a big difference between the death of our young doctor and the death of Jesus Christ. The family of that young doctor wants him to live. They stick by him all the way to the end.

But Jesus, those very people who were saying, Hosanna, Hosanna, a few days later were saying, crucify him. And all his disciples who had thrown their coats on the back of that donkey abandoned him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Every one of them left him.

Jesus' agony, and he knew it was coming, was much greater than that doctor and that family. So here he stands before the city, his own city as king, the rebel city. What's he going to say? What's he going to do? According to Luke, 19:41.

When he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, Oh, that you knew today the terms of peace. But now they are hid from your eyes. For the day shall come upon you when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you and him you in on every side and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you.

And they will not leave one stone upon another because you did not know the time of your visitation. Now, there are three logical levels in this text that I want us to look at together. The most basic level at the bottom is the ignorance of Jerusalem.

In verse 44, they are ignorant of the time of their visitation. In verse 42, they are ignorant of the things that make for peace. The second level that's based on this ignorance is the judgment that's coming upon them in verses 43 and the first part of 44.

The city is going to be leveled. They're going to be dashed to the ground. And then the third level based on that at the top is Jesus response.

He weeps and expresses his willingness to make peace with anybody who would accept his terms of peace. Let's look at these three levels now together this morning. First, the most basic level, the ignorance of Jerusalem.

Judgment is coming upon Jerusalem, Jesus says, because you did not know the time of your visitation. What does visitation mean here? The term visitation is used in the Old Testament to refer both to the coming of God in judgment and to the coming of God in salvation. For example, in Isaiah 29 verse five, the prophet says to the rebellious people, the multitude of your foes shall be like dust.

And in an instant, suddenly you will be visited by the Lord of hosts with thunder and earthquake and great noise. That's a visitation for judgment. But in Genesis 50 verse 24, Joseph, at the end of his life, says this to his brothers, I'm about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of the land to the land which he swore to Abraham.

So the great deliverance at the Exodus is a visitation of God for salvation. Now, if we look in the gospel of Luke, the two places where this idea of visitation occurs outside this one instance here in chapter 19 shows that a visitation for salvation is in mind. For example, in Luke chapter one, verse 68, you remember the words of Zechariah, John the Baptist's father.

He prophesied saying, blessed be the Lord God of Israel for he has visited his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David. And then over seven chapters in Luke seven, 16, Jesus has just raised a young widow's son from the dead in the city of Nain.

And it says that these people in this city were seized with fear and they glorified God, saying a prophet has arisen among us and God has visited his people. Therefore, I think when Jesus says you did not know the time of your visitation, what he means is you don't know that in my coming to you, God has visited you for redemption and for salvation. Jerusalem is ignorant that the time in which they live is utterly unique.

God had never visited his people before in this way and never again would he come to them in the way that he's come to them now in Jesus Christ. This time was utterly unique, but the chosen people were by and large utterly oblivious to what was happening in Jesus Christ. In Luke 12, 54, listen to what Jesus says to the crowd.

When you see a cloud rising in the West, you say at once a shower is coming and it happens. And when you hear a wind blowing from the South, you say there's going to be scorching heat and it happens. You hypocrites, you know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky.

Why do you not know how to interpret the present time? That's a good question. Why? Why didn't Jerusalem know the present time? Why didn't Jerusalem know the time of its visitation? The reason that question is important to answer is this. Someone's going to ask, how can there be a judgment on a city for something they're ignorant of? And someone else is going to ask, could that be true of anybody today that we think we know and we really don't know? Why didn't Jerusalem know her time had come, that the king

had come? I think there's a clue in verse 42 and its connections with the other words in the gospel.

Verse 42, Jesus says, would that today you knew same idea, would that today you knew the things that make for peace. Now, one of the other places, the only other place in this gospel where this term that's translated, the things that make for peace occurs is in chapter 14 verses 31 and 32. There's a parable here.

And Jesus says in this parable, you'll recognize it. What king going to encounter another king in war will not sit down first and take counsel together, whether he's able with 10,000 to meet him who comes against him with 20,000. And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy to ask terms of peace.

That's the same phrase used in Luke 19:42. Oh, that you knew the terms of peace. So the picture we're to have now at the triumphal entry is this.

The king is approaching a rebel city and he has terms of peace. He's willing to offer this rebel city. The king is approaching this hotbed of resistance against him towards his rightful authority.

And he's willing to make peace. Now, when it says, oh, that you knew the terms of peace, does Jesus mean he never sent that embassy? He never told them the terms of peace. They're totally ignorant of what the terms of peace are.

Not at all. Back in Luke 13:34, Jesus had already said this, Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning to those I sent to you. How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not.

That's the answer. The terms of peace had been spelled out, but Jerusalem would not have them again and again, just as affectionately and as strongly as a hen beats her wings to get those chicks under the refuge of her wings. Jesus had beat his wings around Jerusalem, but they would not.

Now the same is true about the time of their visitation. Had they not been told about the time of their visitation, did they not know that the king had come? Yes, they did. Luke 17, verse 20.

Says this being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, that's the time of visitation. Jesus answered them, the kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed, nor will they say, lo, here it is or there. For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you, namely me, Jesus.

Jesus went a long way to dispelling the misunderstandings of the Jewish people, their expectation that the Messiah would come as a political warrior deliverer from Rome. The king and his kingdom had already arrived and it was manifest in Jesus' words and deeds. Listen to Luke 11, 20.

Jesus says, if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. God's kingly rule has arrived in me. They know, they have heard that the time of their visitation has arrived.

They know the terms of peace. And therefore Jesus says, oh, that today you knew the terms of peace and means by that word knew something slightly different. The word no in the Bible very often refers to more than just having heard about and being cognizant of.

For example, in Matthew 7, 22, you remember that place where Jesus confronts on the judgment day people who had ostensibly served him. And he says to them on that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and do many mighty works in your name? And then I will declare to you, depart from me. I never knew you.

What did he mean by that? Jesus knows every fact there is to know about every person. What he meant by that was I never approved of you. I never accepted your behavior as right.

I never once acknowledged you. Now, I think that's what Jesus means in Luke, 19:42 and 44. Oh, that you knew the terms of peace.

Oh, that you approved of the terms of peace. Oh, that you acknowledged the rightness of the terms of peace. Oh, that you accepted into your life the terms of peace that I've had to offer you as the charter of your conduct.

So the reason Jerusalem is guilty and subject to judgment is not because they had never heard the terms of peace, but because, to use Paul's words, they suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. But why? Why did they go on doing that right to the very end? Why couldn't they see what was happening in that last week? Verse 42 gives us one more final answer. Oh, that you knew the terms of peace, but now they are hidden from your eyes.

It's all over for Jerusalem. The sentence has been passed. They're done for.

God has already passed sentence. Two days later, listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 23, 38. How often would I have gathered your children together, O Jerusalem, but you would not.

Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. God has forsaken Jerusalem. He has given them up to their own sin.

They are irreparably blind, and all the terms of peace are hidden from their eyes. Jesus reveals something tremendously important here about his own heart, something very significant. We need to ponder it just a moment.

On the one hand, Jesus expresses tremendous grief at the loss of Jerusalem, that they've rejected his peace proposal. He weeps and cries out, Oh, that you knew the terms of peace. But in the same breath, he bows before the sovereign decree of his heavenly Father.

They're done for. I have closed off the road to repentance for Jerusalem. I have hidden the terms of peace from their eyes.

The divine mind is not simple, and I think to look into the heart of Jesus here gives us a glimpse into the mind of God. Viewing reality in one set of relationships, God says, I am not willing that any should perish. I do not delight in the death of the wicked.

I have no pleasure in their loss. But viewing reality in another set of relationships from a larger, long-term, all-encompassing perspective, God deems it right to sometimes hide the terms of peace from his rebellious people and shut them up to their own sin and decree a judgment upon them. For Jerusalem, that judgment came historically in 70 A.D., and this brings us to the second level of the argument, namely the judgment.

Verses 43 and 44. For the day shall come upon you when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you and hem you in on every side and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another within you. Forty years later, the prophecy comes true.

The Roman armies besiege this city. Some of you recently probably have been looking at that. Besiege this city and conquer it and level the temple to the ground and plow it under, and Jerusalem is over.

I call this the historical form of the judgment pronounced upon Jerusalem because the destruction of a city and the loss of life in physical death is only the beginning of judgment. Nobody in the Bible warned more often or more vividly of hell than did Jesus Christ. In this last week, Glenn mentioned that there were some harsh words, some tough words on Tuesday.

Matthew 23, 31, pronounced in the Holy Week, goes like this. Jesus says to the Pharisees, You witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure of your fathers, you serpents, you brood of vipers.

How are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore, I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, this will come upon this generation. The hand, the cackling, loving hand has become a roaring lion.

There is a too late, isn't there, in dealing with God? There is a too late. He may stretch out his wings and beckon you mercifully again and again, take refuge, take refuge. But there is a too late.

There was for Jerusalem and there will be for those who refuse repeatedly to come. The beckoning will cease. The sentence will be passed and it'll be too late.

How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not. Behold, you are forsaken. That is a frightening thing for Jerusalem to hear.

Now, that's very bleak and sober and fearful. But the third level of the argument is full of hope, full of hope, both then and now for individuals. The third level of the argument is Jesus' own expression.

I still believe with all my heart what I said last summer when I preached on divine judgment from Romans chapter 2. I said then that the only reason that I think the Bible mentions hell, and the only reason a preacher should, is to motivate people to hope in God and to cherish his mercy more intensely. If it doesn't issue in that, it's a completely useless doctrine and truth. I don't think Luke recorded this message here to inform our curiosities about the destruction of Jerusalem.

I think his main purpose was to encourage his readers that Jesus Christ, under that tremendous pressure, like the young doctor who's just come home, is eager and willing to make peace with anybody who accepts his terms of peace. He wept, saying, oh, that you knew today the terms of peace. Oh, that we today would accept and approve the terms of peace that he has to offer.

After Jesus died and rose again and ascended to his Father at his right hand, left the earth behind, he did not abandon us. His offer of peace keeps on coming through his ambassadors. The Apostle Paul describes his ministry like this in 2 Corinthians 5. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not

counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

So we are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal through us, we beseech you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Be reconciled to God.

That's the main point of Palm Sunday. Jesus the King coming to his rebel city and offering them terms of peace. And they are simple terms.

Here are the terms. Lay down your arms. Lay down the weapons of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency by which you are keeping God and his mercy away.

Recognize your defeat. It's all over. Sin has done us in if we don't accept his terms of peace.

Third, accept free and full pardon. Total amnesty if you bow and accept the terms. And fourth, swear your allegiance to the new King of your life.

That's simple. That's easy. Anybody in this room can make peace with Jesus on those terms.

And there is nothing more satisfying than to be the believing subject of a King like that. When I was studying for this sermon, I was simply moved to tears as I pictured Jesus walking into that rebel city. Picture him one last time.

Here he comes. He's on this donkey. He hears the shouts of these potential rebels.

Hosanna! Hosanna! And he knows it's superficial as can be. What does he do? Rebuke them? He defends them. The Pharisees say, you hear what they're saying? Make them be quiet.

He could have done that because it was also superficial. But what does he do? He looks at those Pharisees and he says, if these didn't cry out, the stones would. He accepts their inferior praise.

That young doctor, you remember, had a terminal case. And so did Jesus. But there wasn't a trace of self-pity in Jesus' eyes.

Not a trace, nor in that doctor. Don't you want to have a King like that as the ruler over your life? There's nobody I'd rather serve than a King who could walk into a rebel city and lay himself down under their rebel hammer with not a trace of self-pity. Oh, that today you knew the terms of peace.

I beseech you in the name of Christ, be reconciled to God. Shall we pray in closing? Father, there's a love that you have sent for us. And it will not let us go.

Grant, I pray that the terms of peace are like a great hook that have sunk into the hearts of the people here. Many have laid down their arms years ago. Some are still doing battle with you, trying to keep you out of the city.

Grant that that rebellion cease this morning.

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