

**John Bunyan**



*The Jerusalem  
Sinner Saved; or,  
Good News for  
the Vilest of Men*

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# **The Jerusalem Sinner Saved; or, Good News for the Vilest of Men**



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## BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM.—Luke xxiv. 47.

THE whole verse runs thus: “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

The words were spoken by Christ, after he rose from the dead, and they are here rehearsed after an historical manner, but do contain in them a formal commission, with a special clause therein. The commission is, as you see, for the preaching of the gospel, and is very distinctly inserted in the holy record by Matthew and Mark. “Go teach all nations,” &c. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel unto every creature.” Matt. xxviii. 19; Mark xvi. 15. Only this cause is in special mentioned by Luke, who saith, That as Christ would have the doctrine of repentance and remission of sins preached in his name among all nations, so he would have the people of Jerusalem to have the first proffer thereof. Preach it, saith Christ, in all nations, but begin at Jerusalem.

The apostles then, though they had a commission so large as to give them warrant to go and preach the gospel in all the world, yet by this clause they were limited as to the beginning of their ministry: they were to begin this work at Jerusalem. “Beginning at Jerusalem.”

Before I proceed to an observation upon the words, I must (but briefly) touch upon two things: namely,

- I. Show you what Jerusalem now was.
- II. Show you what it was to preach the gospel to them.
  - I. For the first, Jerusalem is to be considered, either,
    1. With respect to the descent of her people: or,

2. With respect to her preference and exaltation: or,
3. With respect to her present state, as to her decays.

*First,* As to her descent: she was from Abraham, the sons of Jacob, a people that God singled out from the rest of the nations to set his love upon them.

*Secondly,* As to her preference or exaltation, she was the place of God's worship, and that which had in and with her the special tokens and signs of God's favour and presence, above any other people in the world. Hence the tribes went up to Jerusalem to worship; there was God's house, God's high-priest, God's sacrifices accepted, and God's eye, and God's heart perpetually; Psalm lxxvi. 1, 2; Psalm cxxii.; 1 Kings ix. 3. But,

*Thirdly,* We are to consider Jerusalem also in her decays; for as she is so considered, she is the proper object of our text, as will be further showed by and by.

Jerusalem, as I told you, was the place and seat of God's worship, but now decayed, degenerated, and apostatized. The word, the rule of worship, was rejected of them, and in its place they had put and set up their own traditions; they had rejected also the most weighty ordinances, and put in the room thereof their own little things, Matt. xv.; Mark vii. Jerusalem was therefore now greatly backsliding, and become the place where truth and true religion were much defaced.

It was also now become the very sink of sin and seat of hypocrisy, and gulf where true religion was drowned. Here also now reigned presumption, and groundless confidence in God, which is the bane of souls. Amongst its rulers, doctors, and leaders, envy, malice, and blasphemy vented itself

against the power of godliness, in all places where it was espied; as also against the promoters of it; yea, their Lord and Maker could not escape them.

In a word, Jerusalem was now become the shambles, the very slaughter-shop for saints. This was the place wherein the prophets, Christ, and his people, were most horribly persecuted and murdered. Yea, so hardened at this time was this Jerusalem in her sins, that she feared not to commit the biggest, and to bind herself by wish under the guilt and damning evil of it; saying, when she had murdered the Son of God, "His blood be upon us and our children."

And though Jesus Christ did, both by doctrine, miracles, and holiness of life, seek to put a stop to their villanies, yet they shut their eyes, stopped their ears, and rested not, till, as was hinted before, they had driven him out of the world. Yea, that they might, if possible, have extinguished his name, and exploded his doctrine out of the world, they, against all argument, and in despite of Heaven, its mighty hand, and undeniable proof of his resurrection, did hire soldiers to invent a lie, saying, his disciples stole him away from the grave; on purpose that men might not count him the Saviour of the world, nor trust in him for the remission of sins.

They were, saith Paul, contrary to all men: for they did not only shut up the door of life against themselves, but forbade that it should be opened to any else. "Forbidding us," saith he, "to preach to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway;" Matt. xxiii. 35; chap. xv. 7-9; Mark vii. 6-8; Matt. iii. 7-9; John viii. 33, 41; Matt. xxvii.

18; Mark iii. 30; Matt. xxiii. 37; Luke xiii. 33, 34; Matt. xxvii. 25; chap. xx. 11-16; 1 Thess. ii. 14-16.

This is the city, and these are the people; this is their character, and these are their sins: nor can there be produced their parallel in all this world. Nay, what world, what people, what nation, for sin and transgression, could, or can be compared to Jerusalem! especially if you join to the matter of fact the light they sinned against, and the patience which they abused. Infinite was the wickedness upon this account which they committed.

After all their abusings of wise men, and prophets, God sent unto them John Baptist, to reduce them, and then his Son to redeem them; but they would be neither reduced nor redeemed, but persecuted both to the death. Nor did they, as I said, stop here; the holy apostles they afterwards persecuted also to death, even so many as they could; the rest they drove from them unto the utmost corners.

II. I come now to show you what it was to preach the gospel to them. It was, saith Luke, "to preach to them repentance and remission of sins" in Christ's name; or, as Mark has it, to bid them "repent and believe the gospel," Mark i. 15; not that repentance is a cause of remission, but a sign of our hearty reception thereof. Repentance is therefore here put to intimate, that no pretended faith of the gospel is good that is not accompanied with it: and this he doth on purpose, because he would not have them deceive themselves: for with what faith can he expect remission of sins in the name of Christ, that is not heartily sorry for them? Or how shall a man be able to give to others a

satisfactory account of his unfeigned subjection to the gospel, that yet abides in his impenitency?

Wherefore repentance is here joined with faith in the way of receiving the gospel. Faith is that without which it cannot be received at all; and repentance that without which it cannot be received unfeignedly. When therefore Christ says, he would have repentance and remission of sins preached in his name among all nations, it is as much as to say, I will that all men every where be sorry for their sins, and accept of mercy at God's hand through me, lest they fall under his wrath in the judgment. For as I had said, without repentance, what pretence soever men have of faith, they cannot escape the wrath to come. Wherefore Paul saith, God commands "all men every where to repent," (in order to their salvation), "because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained;" Acts xvii. 31.

And now to come to this clause, "Beginning at Jerusalem;" that is, that Christ would have Jerusalem have the first offer of the gospel.

1. This cannot be so commanded, because they had now any more right of themselves thereto than had any of the nations of the world; for their sins had divested them of all self-deservings.

2. Nor yet, because they stood upon the advance-ground with the worst of the sinners of the nations; nay, rather, the sinners of the nations had the advance-ground of them: for Jerusalem was, long before she had added this iniquity to her sin, worse than the very nations that God cast out before the children of Israel; 2 Chron. xxxiii.



3. It must therefore follow, that this clause, Begin at Jerusalem, was put into this commission of mere grace and compassion, even from the overflowings of the bowels of mercy; for indeed they were the worst, and so in the most deplorable condition of any people under the heavens.

Whatever, therefore, their relation was to Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, however they formerly had been the people among whom God had placed his name and worship, they were now degenerated from God, more than the nations were from their idols, and were become guilty of the highest sins which the people of the world were capable of committing. Nay, none can be capable of committing of such pardonable sins as they committed against their God, when they slew his Son, and persecuted his name and word.

From these words, therefore, thus explained, we gain this observation:

That Jesus Christ would have mercy offered in the first place to the biggest sinners.

That these Jerusalem sinners were the biggest sinners that ever were in the world, I think none will deny, that believes that Christ was the best man that ever was in the world, and also was their Lord God. And that they were to have the first offer of his grace, the text is as clear as the sun; for it saith, "Begin at Jerusalem." "Preach," saith he, "repentance and remission of sins" to the Jerusalem sinners: to the Jerusalem sinners in the first place.

One would a-thought, since the Jerusalem sinners were the worst and greatest sinners, Christ's greatest enemies, and those that not only despised his person, doctrine, and miracles, but that a little before had had their hands up to

the elbows in his heart-blood, that he should rather have said, Go into all the world, and preach repentance and remission of sins among all nations; and after that offer the same to Jerusalem; yea, it had been infinite grace, if he had said so. But what grace is this, or what name shall we give it, when he commands that this repentance and remission of sins, which is designed to be preached in all nations, should first be offered to Jerusalem, in the first place to the worst of sinners!

Nor was this the first time that the grace which was in the heart of Christ thus shewed itself to the world. For while he was yet alive, even while he was yet in Jerusalem, and perceived even among these Jerusalem sinners, which was the most vile amongst them, he still in his preaching did signify that he had a desire that the worst of these worst should in the first place come unto him. The which he showeth, where he saith to the better sort of them, "The publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of God before you;" Matt. xxi. 31. Also when he compared Jerusalem with the sinners of the nations, then he commands that the Jerusalem sinners should have the gospel at present confined to them. "Go not," saith he, "into the way of the Gentiles, and into any of the cities of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel;" Matt. x. 5, 6; chap. xxiii. 37; but go rather to them, for they were in the most fearful plight.

These therefore must have the cream of the gospel, namely, the first offer thereof in his lifetime: yea, when he departed out of the world, he left this as part of his last will with his preachers, that they also should offer it first to

Jerusalem. He had a mind, a careful mind, as it seems, to privilege the worst of sinners with the first offer of mercy, and to take from among them a people to be the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb.

The 15th of Luke also is famous for this, where the Lord Jesus takes more care, as appears there by three parables, for the lost sheep, lost goat, and the prodigal son, than for the other sheep, the other pence, or for the son that said he had never transgressed, yea, he shows that there is joy in heaven, among the angels of God, at the repentance of one sinner, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance; Luke xv.

After this manner therefore the mind of Christ was set on the salvation of the biggest sinners in his lifetime. But join to this, this clause, which he carefully put into the apostles' commission to preach, when he departed hence to the Father, and then you shall see that his heart was vehemently set upon it; for these were part of his last words with them, Preach my gospel to all nations, but see that you begin at Jerusalem.

Nor did the apostles overlook this clause when their Lord was gone into heaven: they went first to them of Jerusalem, and preached Christ's gospel to them: they abode also there for a season and time, and preached it to no body else, for they had regard to the commandment of their Lord.

And it is to be observed, namely, that the first sermon which they preached after the ascension of Christ, it was preached to the very worst of these Jerusalem sinners, even to these that were the murderers of Jesus Christ, Acts ii. 23, for these are part of the sermon: "Ye took him, and by