Scripture: Matthew 23:37-39

Sermon: Forsaken and Desolate

Text: Matthew 23:38 -- "Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate."

Proposition: Like the people of Jerusalem in Jesus' time, we are headed for loneliness and disaster unless we turn away from our worldly ways and towards the loving and spiritual example of Jesus.

Dates written: March 15-17, 1971

Dates and places used: March 21, 1971 - Oakland Park, FLA
Introduction:

1. Two women were discussing the cost of living. One of them said "groceries are so high that they have a sign in my grocery store."
   "What does it say?" asked her friend.
   "Buying groceries is hazardous to your wealth," came the reply.

2. Jesus spoke of some hazards to both health and home of the people of Jerusalem, quite often. One such address came at the end of the Seven Woe sayings in the 23rd chapter of Matthew, at which we have looked in the past few weeks. As a sort of summary to the Pharisees, scribes, elders, and many other Jerusalemites, Jesus spoke the words which are now found in Matthew 23:37-39, and also, in almost identical form in Luke 13:34-35. The faults of which he spoke which brought about the hazards of which he warned in the case of the Jerusalemites might well be thought of as typical of many of us of today too, for

II. As the people of Jerusalem repeatedly sinned, so we repeatedly turn away from God too.
1. In the Seven Woe sayings Jesus pointed to one way after another in which his listeners harmed others and violated God's law, while simultaneously carrying out forms of worship designed to demonstrate their religiousity. He referred to the ancestors of the current Jerusalem generation, pointing out how they, too, had hurt and killed the prophets of God, and otherwise turned away from righteousness.

2. A reading of the Old Testament makes it clear that was the pattern of the Israelites all through history, which went in cycles. Another aspect was turning away from keeping the covenant with God. Then came God's anger and punishment. Then was repentance by the sinful people or nation, followed by God's forgiveness. The people would then make a new start but within a few generations the cycle was repeating itself.

3. Jesus was referring to this type of pattern and how it was operating in relationship to himself, when
Matthew 23:37-39

said, as recorded in our Scripture, "How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!"

4. The way we deal with New Years resolutions is indicative of how we of today do just what Jesus was talking about. Year after year we make vows at the beginning of the year to drop certain bad habits and to take on certain good ones. Year after year we fail to keep these resolutions very long. Repeatedly we continue in the same old sins.

5. Many of us today are not at all ashamed, and quite often not even aware, of our sins. We have such self-confidence in our own goodness that it is not at all unusual to hear people say, "I don't do any sinning." Psychiatry in a few cases may be helpful in diminishing the feeling of sin in people, but all too often its influence has been to help people feel that you don't have to feel guilty over anything. Law enforcement officers talk of the fact that many of those whom they have to arrest don't consider
that they have done anything wrong; though they may have pushed dope, stolen, raped, broken speed laws, used foul language in the hearing of people who were quite offended, and so on. Morals today are breaking down, we hear so frequently. Many an adult Sunday School class spends a great deal of its time bemoaning the fact. Many a sermon points it out, even as we are doing here.

6. We can't just point the finger at others, however. We, the church people, persons who may consider ourselves exemplifiers of what's right and guardians of morality, are sinners too. So often, some of the most intolerant, dogmatic, fanatical, hard-to-get-along-with, selfish people are the pillars of the local churches of a community. Maybe I'm not as good as I think I am. Maybe you're not. If we listen to Jesus and take this Scripture seriously, we know we're not. We repeat time after time our harshness and intolerance, our pettiness and touchiness, our selfishness and gluttony seeking. We, like the people of Jerusalem are sinners, who keep turning away from God, Christ, and Christ's teachings.
I. Because we keep turning away, like Jerusalem's people, we and our objects of pride will become forsaken and desolate, feeling rejected by man and God.

1. One night two parents went to a movie. They told their three sons, age 14, 10 and 8, to clean up the supper dishes. When they returned, the boys were draped around the living room, watching TV. "Well," inquired the mother, "what did you boys do?"

Proudly, the oldest said, "I washed the dishes."

"And I dried them," exclaimed the second boy.

Turning to the youngest, the mother asked, "What did you do?"

Said the 8 year old, "I picked up the pieces."

(Quote, March 7, 1971)

2. Sooner or later, times come in everyone's life when all he has valued seems shattered, and the pieces of life hardly seem worth picking up. We feel forsaken at such times. Or perhaps desolate.

3. Jesus used these two words, "forsaken" and "desolate", to describe
what will happen to both the city and its inhabitants, if they continue the cruel, harmful and ungodly ways about which he has talked with them.

A city that is desolate is deprived of inhabitants, is deserted and gloomy. I saw many deserted, gloomy, desolate houses in the midwest of our country, where people have moved off the farm lands and the houses gradually are falling down and deteriorating. It is not cheerful, but depressing to look at these sites of former normal and happy living. A desolate place usually is in a ruinous condition. A person who is desolate is left alone, is forsaken, and feels lonely.

The word "forsaken" usually is used to refer to something that once was dear to a person or people, but which now is renounced or abandoned. A forsaken city has been left entirely, deserted, abandoned. A forsaken person has lost all his friends and most of his inner assurance, and feels empty and lonesome.

In using these two words, "desolate" and "forsaken" Jesus was describing something undesirable and disastrous. Desolation and forsaken visited on
some place or someone you love is to be grieved. That is the way Jesus felt about Jerusalem.

4. He began this saying with the words, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." The very repetition of the name imparts a sense of sadness. We have every reason to believe that Jesus, like most of his people then and now, loved Jerusalem. Its beauty, its history, its association with the scriptures that he loved, because God had chosen it as the place where his voice was often heard and his work done, were reasons for this love of Jerusalem. It was a patriotism based upon religious conviction. For seeing the end that was bound to take place if the people of Jerusalem continued as they were, Jesus was sorrowful. There is no question but that much of this sorrow was over the fate of the people of the city, too, since we know how he valued and loved each person, whether child, man, woman, ill person, sinner, or outcast.

5. In spite of this love for Jerusalem and its people, he still was compelled to see and state realistically its terrible future, unless change came
We here and now should take this warning to us, in terms of our present. We love our nice houses, our beautiful church, our public buildings, our dependable cars, our TV sets, our comfortable clothing, our abundant leisure time, our pretentious parties and banquets. You can add to the list, and so can I. We really spend far more time on these things, non-essential to physical existence, than we do on anything else. If the worship of God gets any time, it is a minimal fraction. Yet, our very devotion to security and showiness and pleasure is destroying us, because no one can think about material things and activities constantly without losing the feeling for human values.

6. That's why it is so hard for us in the comfortable middle class to be patient with the poorer, dirtier, less-motivated lower class black or white. That's why we admire and kowtow to the rich person or the powerful position. We emphasize the material, not the spiritual, not the human spirit. That emphasis is what many of the young people and minority groups are protesting today, and we
I can't understand them. In discussing the war in southeast Asia, I've even heard church people cold-bloodedly say that the world would be better off if there were fewer of such people. We whites, we church people and we materially-well-off people are a small minority of the world's people. The resentment shows even from those whom we try to help, in many parts of the world. The destruction of us and of our nation, cities and homes is threatened. It could take place. The way to prevent it isn't a stronger and more brutal militarism or oppressive police state. Instead, a return to Jesus, his way of treating people, his unconcern with ownership and things, his constant reference to God as the source of guidance. That turnabout is something we can still make, because

III. God through Jesus is ready again and again to forgive us and to take us into his kingdom.

1. A man visiting a psychiatrist for the first time told the doctor, "I was really hoping you'd tell me I've a split personality." "In heaven's name," replied the
psychiatrist, "why would you want to be like that?"

"Because," said the patient, "I get so lonely for someone to talk to!"

2. No matter how dejected or lonely we feel, God is always willing to have us talk to him. Especially when we make good sense by asking him for help in de-emphasizing our love of things and power, our distrust of people who are different from us, our callousness to the hardship of others, and so on. When we confess our sins, he listens, forgives, and gives us a new chance. Then it is that he "comes into the city" again, into our hearts, and we praise him in the same spirit that the people did on the original Palm Sunday.

Conclusion:

1. The Scripture that we read today is, then, relevant to you and to me.

2. It tells us that we are like the people of Jerusalem in Jesus' time, headed for loneliness and disaster unless we turn from our worldly ways.
and seek to follow Jesus in his loving, humanitarian and spiritual traits. If we can't do that, we indeed are increasingly forsaken and desolate.