

1 Samuel 2: My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in God...There is no Holy One like the Lord, no one besides you; there is no rock like our God.

Introduction

It's not fun when things break down. Like, who here has said, *with excitement*, "Yes! The fridge is broken!" Or "I was hoping the car would break down!" Or, "Aww, yeah, my knee is acting up again!" No child has ever skipped gleefully to their parent happy that their favorite stuffed animal—the one they've fastidiously dragged about every day for the past 5 years—finally lost its ear. Whether it's the fridge, the car, one's body, or that well-loved stuffy; everything breaks down eventually.

But it's not just material items—the things purchased from retailers and dealers—that break down. And when it comes to our lives, it's not just our physical framework—muscles, bones, ligaments, tendons, organs, etc.—that breaks down. We can break down on the *inside*. Our inner world and our inner life are as susceptible to breaking down as our physical bodies are. Our mind, our emotions, our feelings, our spirituality, our conscience—all of it—can enter an event of break down, of deconstruction. And it certainly happens when we've been thrust on to a collision course with destruction and chaos: some external event occurs challenging the security and comfortability we previously enjoyed. Maybe it's a breakup from a beloved, maybe a rejection, maybe a loss of a job or a friendship, maybe a death, maybe the weight of too many demands, maybe the isolation of loneliness, maybe even being forced to let go of what was...all of it can thrust us into inner turmoil, inner breakdown, inner falling apart, inner grief and pain. In that moment where we are thrust into such a moment, we are asked one simple yet painful question: *will you turn a blind eye to this and run? Or will you face it and walk through?*

The answer depends on where love is.

Mark 13:1-8

Then while [Jesus] was departing from the temple, one of the disciples says to him, "Teacher, behold (!) how magnificent [the] stones and how magnificent [the] buildings!" And then Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not a stone will be left upon a stone here; it will be overthrown." (Mk 13:1-2)¹

There's no textual gap in Mark's story progression, so it's safe to assume that the one who sat opposite the treasury in the Court of Women, has stood up and exited the temple. The one who is the son of God—established by Mark in 1:1—is now exiting the building.

As he leaves with his disciples, one of them points out how magnificent the stones are and how magnificent is the building comprised of those magnificent stones. And truly they were magnificent—both the stones and the temple building itself. (One can travel to see the remnants of those stones of the Herodian walls and fall in awe of the magnitude and the

¹ Translation mine unless otherwise noted.

presence of the remaining stones—just the remnants and not the structure itself.²) There's no shame in the disciple marveling and pointing out that the stones and the building are quite magnificent. Thus, Jesus isn't chastising the disciple when he answers him with the rather cryptic: *do you see these great stones and this great building? Well, it's all going to break down and be overthrown; its time is up; it's no longer necessary.*³ Jesus isn't rebuking; he's proclaiming.

And this proclamation comes with some big words. In fact, these words are threatening words. Some think these words are so dangerous that they are the fuel behind Jesus's eventual arrest and captivity. There's good reason to think this. Mentioning the destruction of the temple brought with it serious consequences for the one who mentioned it. This is the case because according to the Hebrew Scriptures, God tells Solomon that the destruction of the temple will be the punishment of Israel for their disobedience (1 Kings 9). Other prophets pick up on this theme.⁴ So, Jesus isn't messing around using these words.

Also, the entire life of the Israelite revolved around this structure; what would become of them if this structure was now gone? Without this particular and important structure of authority, what would become of them, their lives, their worship and relationship with God, their identity and being?⁵ The centrality of the temple explains why the disciples grew eager for a sign for when this is will happen...they would want to prepare themselves for this divine judgment, this impending internal upheaval and breaking down.

² RT France *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* NIGTC Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002. 496, "The specific mention of λίθοι, while it serves in Mark's context to prepare for the saying λίθος ἐπὶ λίθῳ in v. 2, corresponds to Josephus's specific mention of the enormous blocks of stone used in the building (though a single block of forty-five cubits in length, *War* 5.224, is hard to believe). The disciple's amazement is shared even by modern visitors who see the huge ashlar blocks in the remaining Herodian walls, and these were only the substructure, not the temple proper."

³ France *Mark* 496. "For the disciple's touristic awe Jesus substitutes a cruel realism. Splendid as the structure may be, its time is over. 'Jesus' reply is to dismiss the magnificent display as — in the context of his ministry and mission—a massive irrelevance (Mann, 495)."

⁴ France *Mark* 495, "Jesus was not the first to predict the temple's destruction. God's declaration to Solomon at the temple's dedication envisaged such a possibility if Israel proved disobedient (1 Ki. 9:6-8), and the threat was taken up by Micah (3:12), and repeatedly by Jeremiah (7:12-15; 12:7; 22:5; 26:6). It was only the memory of Micah's prophecy which saved Jeremiah from execution for treason on this basis (Je. 26:10-19), and another prophet with the same message, Uriah, was not so fortunate (Je. 26:20-23). A generation after the death of Jesus another Jesus, son of Hananiah, was put on trial for threats against the city and its temple (Josephus, *War* 6.300-309). Jesus was embarking on a dangerous course."

⁵ France *Mark* 494. "The unnamed disciple's superficial admiration for the magnificence of the buildings, contrasted with Jesus' declaration of their ultimate bankruptcy, furnishes yet another example of the reorientation to the new perspective of the kingdom of God to which the disciples are committed but which they remain slow to grasp, and which Mark expects his readers to embrace. The old structure of authority in which God's relationship with his people has hitherto been focused, is due for replacement."

In this passage, Jesus is predicting and promising (as God does with God's declared word) the end of the old order⁶ and the beginning of the new one. What *was* the center of the kingdom of God is now no longer the center of the kingdom of God. The Christ is. Thus, Jesus—as he proceeds through his journey to the cross and subsequent resurrection and ascension—will redefine what the center of the kingdom of God and therein redefine what the kingdom of God is for God's people.⁷ Will the disciples turn a blind eye and run? Or will they face it and enter in?

The answer depends on where love is.

Conclusion

Over the past couple of weeks, I've stressed the activity of love. Love's language is always action. Love's language is always action... even if small. And today: love's language is always action even if small...small enough to weave and wend and grow through the rubble.

Even though in our passage Jesus leaves the temple—signifying for the readers (if they're watching, listening, and paying close attention to the story) that God left that particular building—Jesus hasn't left the people. In fact, Jesus's exodus (thus, God's exodus) from the temple is God moving *toward* the people and away from the abusive and oppressive systems and structures holding so many people captive. These old systems and structures must be overthrown and brought to death for new life to come forward.

So God, in the word of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, is calling forth something new out of the death of something old...even if it's a pile of rubble: the rubble of an overthrown temple, the rubble of an overthrown church, the rubble of our physical bodies, the rubble of formerly held ideologies and assumptions, the rubble of our inner lives. Because God is love, and love's language is always action no matter how small...even small enough to make its way around any crack and crevice, even if it's literal or metaphorical magnificent stones now no longer one on top of the other. And in the rubble, Love becomes new magnificent stones of the foundation of the most magnificent new structure: new life.

Beloved, as you look around you, as your heart breaks over loss and letting go, as you feel that internal chaos and breaking down, as you watch the dust of your former lives settle around you, do not lose hope. Do not turn a blind eye and run. Face it and enter in. Love *is* there. Love

⁶ France *Mark* 498. "The disciples' question with which it begins seeks elucidation of Jesus' pronouncement about the destruction of the temple, and it is this question which must set the agenda for our interpretation of the discourse which follows. It is about 'the end of the old order'."

⁷ France *Mark* 497-498. "The mutual hostility between Jesus and the Jerusalem establishment has now reached its culmination in Jesus' open prediction of the destruction of the temple, with its powerful symbolism of the end of the existing order and the implication that something new is to take its place. This is to be a time of unprecedented upheaval in the life and leadership of the people of God. Jerusalem, and the temple which is the focus of its authority, is about to lose its central role in God's economy. The divine government, the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, is to find a new focus."

is working its way through that internal rubble, seeking the beloved, calling her back to life, new life, life built on the firm foundation of love.