

Luke 23:26-31
“Weep for the Lost”

26 Now as they led Him away, they laid hold of a certain man, Simon a Cyrenian, who was coming from the country, and on him they laid the cross that he might bear it after Jesus.

27 And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him.

28 But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

29 "For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which never nursed!'

30 "Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" '

31 "For if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?"

As we come to these verses that tell us the circumstances of Christ's journey out of the city of Jerusalem and up the Via Dela Rosa to the place of execution, a hill called Golgotha, I'm going to divide the sermon into two parts. First we'll briefly look at verse 26 and the story of Simon the Cyrenian, and then we'll look at Christ's words to the women of Jerusalem.

1) Part of the Roman penalty of crucifixion involved the prisoner actually carrying his own cross from the place of judgment to the place of execution, its an act of contempt rather like making those about to be shot dig their own graves. But in this case the Roman soldiers realize that Jesus is going to be physically unable to carry the heavy wooden cross up to the Hill. At this point, his body is no doubt near the breaking point.

He didn't sleep all the previous night, but even while Apostles slept because they were exhausted, Jesus was awake wrestling in prayer in Gethsemane, preparing spiritually for the ordeal to come. That experience alone we read was so intense that He sweat drops of blood. Then he had to go through being arrested, marched into the city, undergoing trial, mockery, and beating before the high priest, then trial again before the Sanhedrin, then he is marched off to Pilate for yet another trial, then off to Herod for more trial and mockery, then back to Pilate for yet one final trial, followed by mocking, beating, and then scourging. The legionaries no doubt see Jesus begin to falter, and so they grab someone coming in the opposite direction, a man called Simon, a native of Cyrene which is in modern day Libya. Now, I doubt the Romans did this out of pity, these legionaries were professional executioners, no doubt operating according to a schedule, from their point of view they had to get this convict and his cross to the top of the hill, and they certainly weren't going to carry his cross. So they grabbed another lowly Jew to carry it for them. Roman law, stated that a legionary was allowed to compel a non-citizen to carry a burden for him for up to a mile. Hence when Jesus is teaching on Self-Denial in Matt. 5:41 he says "***And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.***"

Now the odd thing is that we are even told the name of the man who carried the cross, why is that important? ***Because of what happened to this man because of this “chance” encounter with Christ.*** Simon was no doubt in Jerusalem for the Passover, he never intended to be the cross bearer for a convict. But God had other plans for Simon. The bearing of Christ that day, his words to the women, and then his words on the cross, made such an impression on Simon that he became a Christian. Now we know that not only from church history, but also because Mark writing perhaps 20 or more years later in his gospel points out to his readers in the church at Rome that Simon is the father of Alexander and Rufus, in other words the father of a family well known to the members of the church. So that they

would have said, “*Oh! That Simon*” as they read it. Paul also greets Rufus in his own letter to the Romans, commenting also that Rufus’ mother, Simon’s wife, was like a mother to him.

There is a divine poetry in what happened to Simon. Jesus had declared in Luke 9:23 “*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*” Simon goes from literally taking up the cross of Christ and physically following him, to being converted and spiritually taking up his own cross and becoming a follower of Jesus.

It’s amazing isn’t it how God weaves the circumstances of history together for his purposes? Here we have a man, who probably would have said at that moment, *oh no* when he first met Jesus on the road, and yet because of that meeting, and that terrible inconvenience his family ends up greatly assisting Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles? That divine eye perspective should help us to understand the “inconveniences” even in our own lives [Corrie Ten Boom – Betsie “*You must thank God for everything, even for lice.*”]

2) A great multitude of the people of Jerusalem follows Jesus, by this time word was no doubt spreading about what had happened to the man whom many had hailed as the Son of David and who had been preaching daily at the Temple. So they came to see, some no doubt were there just out of curiosity, some out of spite, some because they genuinely believed in him. And then there were the women of Jerusalem, who looking at Christ in such a terrible state, being taken out of Jerusalem to die a horrible death, pitied him and mourned over him. Now these women were not disciples of Christ, but unlike the men who had been screaming for his blood earlier, they do have more compassion. A lot of them probably realized the injustice of the situation, and thought *here is a good man, and a good teacher, he has done nothing worthy of this death.* A lot of people even today take that attitude towards Christ. They hear about the death of Jesus, or they see a movie and they get all sentimental, a few tears even, and say “*That’s so terrible, people can be so mean can’t they?*” and then after a few more touchy-feely sayings they dry their eyes and continue on with their lives.

But friends, that is *NOT* that attitude that Jesus wants us to take. He even says to the women “*Don’t weep for me – weep for yourselves and for your children!*”

Why does Jesus say that? He says it out of Compassion, yes He has been the victim of terrible injustice, yes he has suffered greatly and He will suffer more in a little while, more than anyone has ever suffered before or will ever suffer again. He is bearing all the sins of all his sheep, and is about to suffer the Father’s just punishment for those sins. An inconceivable trial, and yet He will triumph because of it. This greatest of all evils, will produce the greatest of all Goods – *it is the key to salvation.* So while Jesus is going through terrible suffering, it is suffering that will have a wonderful result.

Now I know this isn’t a popular notion these days, I mean we live in a world that says all suffering is always bad, we must do anything to avoid it, but some suffering has a good end. Consider childbirth for instance. Intense suffering, I mean it hurts me just to watch it. Who on earth would do that more than once? And yet women are willing to go through it because even in the midst of the pain they see the desired end. New life. A heritage from the Lord. But that’s not the only example I could cite.

Consider the pain an addict goes through during withdrawal, and yet that suffering is worth it to be free. Or how about the unbelievable suffering associated with the “Q” course, but if you survive it, at the end you have a newly minted SF soldier. So not all suffering is bad, and after the good end is

achieved we don't throw dust on our heads, and weep and lament. I mean after your child is born you feel joy, you celebrate. You don't mourn and lament for several weeks because of the terrible pain that was involved. Now that doesn't mean that sitting down won't be painful for several days, but even that pain can't take away the joy.

You see that is one of the many reasons the crucifix is so unworthy as a Christian symbol. It is an ongoing portrayal of the suffering of Christ as though it hasn't ended. As though he didn't say "***It is finished***" As though he has not risen again. The suffering of Christ was once for all, not ongoing.

"...the pathos of the crucifix obscures the glory of Christ, for it hides the fact of his deity, his victory on the cross, and his present kingdom. It displays his human weakness, but it conceals his divine strength; it depicts the reality of his pain, but keeps out of our sight the reality of his joy and his power. ... the symbol is unworthy most of all because of what it fails to display. And so are all other visible representations of deity." – ***J.I. Packer***

Now the reason Jesus says to the women, don't weep for me, weep for yourselves, is because He knows the terrible tribulation Jerusalem and its inhabitants will go through several years later because of their failure to embrace their Messiah, their redeemer. In 66 AD the Jews, having rejected Christ and tired of waiting for God to send them the political Messiah they wanted, will rebel against the Romans. Four years after that, the Jewish armies in the field will be defeated, and Jerusalem itself will be besieged by Titus' legions. The siege will go on for months. In the city itself, there will be unimaginable suffering. The citizens will slowly starve, disease will spread, the rebels in the city will turn on one another and terrorize the inhabitants, murder will become commonplace. Eventually even cannibalism within families will occur. But not even that will compare to the scenes that will occur when the Roman legions finally break into the city and sack it. In that day, the living will envy the dead, and the mothers will wish something inconceivable to a Jewish woman, that they had never had children.

That day, Jesus says, will be like what Hosea prophesied the people of Samaria would say when their city was sacked by the Assyrians. And we remember that Samaria, the capital of the ten northern tribes of Israel was destroyed because of their rebellion against God and their apostasy. Hosea 10:8 – "***They shall say to the mountains, "Cover us!" And to the hills, "Fall on us!"***"

Jesus warns these women of what is coming and then he asks "***if they do these things in the green wood, what will be done in the dry***" There are a number of interpretations of that saying, all of them point to basically the same thing. Green wood is unseasoned, its inappropriate for burning, it doesn't burn well. You burn dry wood. In other words if the Romans do this to a man who they themselves admit is innocent of treason and rebellion, what do you think they will they do to the truly guilty? ***In other words, if this is happening to me – a man wholly innocent – what will happen to you, who are full of sin?***

Application - Here is the application, as you read about the crucifixion today, you are living in the age of grace, Jesus is once again calling you to take up your cross and follow him. Yes this will involve a degree of suffering, the servant is not greater than the Master and self-denial is not an easy thing. I know its easier to stay in bed than to get up and go to church, and sometimes it is painful to heave yourself out and collect the kids and all of that. But all of that suffering produces a good end.

Kids, you may not believe it now, but your parents bring you to church, and make you do family worship, and get you to memorize scripture, and make you keep the Lord's day holy, not because they hate you and want to do you harm but because they love you, and want you to enjoy blessings.

Now you may be tempted to be like the daughters of Jerusalem, and to be non-committal, to stand on the sidelines, watching Christ and feeling sentimental feelings towards him, but never being like Simon in actually taking up your cross and following Him. Jesus graciously warns you - *DON'T DO THAT!*

Rev. 6:12 I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood.

13 And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.

14 Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

15 And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains,

16 and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"

17 "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

Weep not for the Lord, weep for the LOST!