

## Message #119

## Luke 23:26-32

Near the end of last year, someone was going over the sports people who died in 2020. In the sport of basketball there was Kobe Bryant; in the sport of football there was Don Shula, Tom Dempsey, Gayle Sayers and Paul Horning. In the sport of baseball there was Tom Seaver, Lou Brock, Bob Gibson, Whitey Ford, Joe Morgan and Al Kaline. The person who was reflecting on all of this said concerning their deaths these are all tragic losses.

A couple of thousand years ago, Jesus Christ was led to His own execution to die on a cross. As He was heading to His execution, He was not receiving kind care and good treatment. Not too many thought this will be a tragic loss. In fact, most wanted Him to die. He was surrounded by people who were humiliating Him and degrading Him.

Those closest to Him had abandoned Him (Mark 14:50). Judas had betrayed Him (Luke 22:47-48). Peter had denied Him (Luke 22:54-62). He had gone through six ridiculous trials and was proved innocent in every single trial. Yet He was sentenced to die.

Now most would look at this today and say Christ's death was tragic, and it was. But it is not a tragic loss for Jesus Christ; it is a tragic loss for the people. **Make no mistake about this; Jesus Christ is the victor here, not the victim.**

By what Jesus Christ Himself says in this very passage to those in Israel was this:

**WHEN JESUS CHRIST WAS BEING LED TO HIS OWN CRUCIFIXION, HE MADE IT VERY CLEAR THAT HE WAS NOT THE LOSER, THE PEOPLE WERE.**

The truth is Jesus Christ went through every bit of this for us. Those who understand this point do not end up mourning, but rejoicing.

There are four historical narrative observations we want to make:

**HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #1 – Simon carries Christ's cross. 23:26**

It was the custom for a criminal to carry his own cross from the place of sentencing to the place of execution.

There is a debate as to whether or not the entire cross was carried by the condemned criminal or just the wooden cross beam was carried. A typical Roman cross weighed about 300 pounds. According to the NIV Bible note of Mark 15:21, just the cross beam would weigh 30 to 40 pounds (*The NIV Study Bible*, p. 1528). However, that seems light. Most believe a cross beam weighed 80-100 pounds.

Now the beam was approximately 6-7 feet long and would be placed on the nape of the neck and then extend along the shoulders. The shortest possible route that I can find from the Praetorium where Pilate tried Christ to the place of crucifixion was about ½ mile.

Christ had been up all night and had been beaten all night and had been on His feet all night and, as a result, He physically could not carry the weight for the distance and He apparently stumbled under the load.

If you read the accounts of Matthew, Mark and Luke, it would appear that Jesus never did carry His own cross and that Simon carried it the entire way. But if you carefully look at John 19:17, we know that when Jesus left Pilate, He was “bearing His own cross.”

So we make the assumption that at some point along the route, Jesus could not carry the cross or cross beam. In fact, William Hendriksen made an interesting observation when he said when you think of the last hours of Christ—Upper room; betrayal; Gethsemane; desertion; torture, trials, scourging and death penalty, “It is a wonder He could carry the cross any distance at all.”

Apparently Jesus stumbled under the weight and the Romans seized Simon to carry the cross for Jesus.

Simon was from Cyrene. Cyrene was a city located in North Africa. It was located about 800 miles west of Jerusalem as the crow flies and about 350 miles to 400 miles NW of the Egyptian border. **Cyrene is in Libya. It is present day Tripoli.**

We do not know whether Simon was coming into Jerusalem from the country area, meaning he now lived in the Jerusalem area or whether he was coming to Jerusalem from Cyrene for the Passover.

We do know from Biblical records that there was a group from Cyrene who lived somewhere near Jerusalem and they even had their own synagogue (Acts 2:5, 10; 6:9).

Simon was singled out by the Romans to bear the cross of Jesus Christ. This selection of Simon was orchestrated by God and God wanted him to help His Son on this.

God would not allow just anyone to bear His son’s cross. He chose the man He wanted. This was a very sacred moment in the eternal plan of God and God wanted Simon sharing this.

**We know that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21).** We also know that Rufus and his mother, Simon’s wife, ended up in Rome (Rom. 16:13). History and tradition says that Simon eventually moved to Rome, with his family and settled there.

We also learn that some of the strongest N.T. Christians eventually came from Cyrene (Acts 11:20; 13:1).

So from all of this data, we may conclude that this is God's selection of the man He wanted to help carry the cross of His own Son. Cross bearing is no easy assignment; but God specifically selects those He wants to bear it.

**HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #2** – A large crowd followed Jesus. **23:27**

A large crowd followed Jesus Christ along the route and a large number of them were women. These women were loyal to Christ and they had watched Him and listened to Him and they were now going to watch Him die and they were emotional wrecks.

The women were “mourning and lamenting.” Those two words mean they were loudly wailing out of great grief. The Greek text is emphatic in that it was the women and not the men.

Let me suggest that as emotional as these women were, they were still not really right with Jesus Christ. In fact, by Christ's response, they were heading to severe judgment.

**This verse teaches us a very important lesson—we must be careful not to judge one's spiritual condition by one's emotional condition.** The truth is, in this situation, the ones who were really right with God had run away and those not right with Him were near Him weeping.

We do not know why people emotionally react the way they do. I was at a funeral one time and a person was weeping and come to find out they did not even know the deceased or anyone in the family. They happened to be there and for whatever reason was very emotional about someone they did not even know.

Sometimes emotional responses do mean something and sometimes they do not mean anything. These people are weeping and wailing and they are heading to judgment.

You can walk down an aisle at church with tears streaming down your cheeks and still not really be right with God. Just because someone has some emotional reaction does not mean they are truly right with God.

Scriptures over and over again stress the importance of developing sound minds and not weeping and wailing emotions.

**HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #3** – Jesus responds to the crowd. **23:28-31**

Jesus' message is clear—don't weep for Me, weep for yourself because your judgment is coming. Jesus says if you are mourning for Me, you have the wrong understanding of this. Jesus says, I am not the One in trouble here, you are.

Christ commanded the Jewish women to stop weeping for Him and start weeping for yourselves and your children.

These are some of the final words Christ repeats before His own execution and He tells these people to stop weeping for what is going to happen to Him and begin weeping for what is going to happen to them. Jesus Himself had wept over that—Luke 19:41.

In **verses 29-30**, Jesus gives two stated reasons to these Jewish women why they should weep for themselves:

**Reason #1** - Because a judgment is coming that is so severe it will be a better blessing to be barren. **23:29**

Jesus says what you do not understand is that there is coming a ferocious judgment against you that will be so severe because you have rejected Me that the woman who will be blessed will be the ones without any children. When this judgment hits, it will be so severe that any woman who has children will have to watch them die.

In the Jewish world to call a barren woman blessed was unheard of. In fact, a barren woman was considered to be one cursed by God and one ostracized by the people (Luke 1:25, 36). Every Jewish woman longed to have children.

Jesus mentions the womb of a woman that gives birth to a child and the breasts of a woman that gives nourishment to the child. Combined, these two images speak of a time when it would be better to have no children who had ever been born to a woman.

Jesus says stop weeping for Me and start weeping for yourselves because what you are about to experience will mean the barren woman will be the blessed woman.

Undoubtedly Jesus was looking into the future to the year AD 70. The greatest or worst description ever written in history was the account written by Josephus in his Jewish War #6. Dr. Richard Lenski, the Lutheran Greek scholar of the 1800's, said that account by Josephus was the most horrible thing that has ever been put in writing in human history. I want to read some of it:

“...In the meantime, countless thousands of Jews died of hunger. In every house where there was the least morsel of food, relatives fought over it. Gaping with hunger, the outlaws prowled around like mad dogs, gnawing at anything: belts, shoes, and even the leather from their shields. Others devoured wisps of hay, and then there was the incredible horror of Mary of Bethzuba.

Distinguished in family and fortune, Mary had fled to Jerusalem from Perea, but her property had been plundered by the tyrants during the siege and her food by the daily raids of their followers. Maddened by hunger, she seized the infant at her breast and said, “Poor baby, why should I preserve you for war, famine and rebellion? Come, be my food-vengeance against the rebels, and the climax of Jewish tragedy for the world.” With that, she killed her infant son, roasted his body, and devoured half if it hiding the remainder.

Instantly the rebels arrived, sniffing the unholy smell and threatening her with death if she did not produce what she had prepared.

She had reserved a final portion for them too, she replied, uncovering the remnants of her baby. They stood paralyzed with horror. “This is my child and my action,” she said. “Help yourselves, for I’ve had my share. Don’t be weaker than a woman or more compassionate than a mother! But if you’re squeamish and disapprove of my sacrifice, then leave the rest for me.” ...

While the temple was in flames, the victors stole everything they could lay their hands on, and slaughtered all who were caught. No pity was shown to age or rank, old men or children, the laity or priests—all were massacred. As the flames roared up, and since the temple stood on a hill, it seemed as if the whole city were ablaze.

The noise was deafening, with war cries of legions, howls of the rebels surrounded by fire and sword, and shrieks of the people. The ground was hidden by corpses, and the soldiers had to climb over heaps of bodies in pursuit of the fugitives.”

(Paul L. Maier, *Josephus, The Essential Writings*, pp. 358-361)

Jesus said don’t weep for Me, weep for yourselves for I know what is coming.

Jesus sees into the future. He sees what the Romans would do in AD 70 in killing, looting and burning. He saw what the Muslims would do to Jerusalem in AD 636, taking Jerusalem and building their idolatrous shrine Dome of the Rock in AD 691. He saw what the Egyptians would do in their vicious persecution of the Jews from AD 1293-1900. He saw what Hitler would do from 1939-1945 and He saw what will happen in the Tribulation. Jesus said, don’t weep for Me, weep for yourselves because this nation is heading to one disaster after another for the next 2,000 years.

**Reason #2** - Because a judgment is coming that will be so severe it will be more blessed to be crushed by falling mountains. **23:30-31**

Not only did Jesus see the horrors of the Roman destruction in AD 70, but He also saw the coming Tribulation horrors.

Notice how **verse 30** begins, “then they will begin to say.” So the destruction that comes in AD 70 is just the beginning. Israel will pay a very high price for rejecting and killing Jesus Christ. That price is still being paid today and it will culminate in the Great Tribulation when God literally moves mountains (Rev. 6:15).

People will be crying out for the mountains to fall on them and crush them. They will want a quick death.

The “for” that begins **verse 31** indicates if you are suffering in AD 70, when judgment is green, what do you think will happen when the judgment is most severe in the Tribulation.

**HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OBSERVATION #4** – Two criminals were condemned with Him. **23:32**

The prophecy of Isaiah came true—Jesus “was numbered with the transgressors” (Is. 53:12).

What happened to Jesus Christ should cause every person to look at himself. The reason Jesus is going to die on a cross is to save sinners. Our only hope of salvation is in what Jesus Christ accomplished on that cross. If you will believe on Jesus Christ, you will be saved forever. But if you refuse, then weep for yourself because you will end up suffering eternal judgment.