

To Seek and to Save the Lost

Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem

Luke 19:41-44

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Scripture

Jesus' three-year-long ministry was about to come to an end.

Luke 19:28 is the beginning of Jesus' final week on earth. It began with his triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem. The people were rejoicing and praising God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen Jesus do. They were exuberant about his arrival at Jerusalem. They thought that he was the coming Messiah, but they misunderstood his true mission. They wanted a *political* Messiah, a political Savior, someone who would free them from Roman oppression. But Jesus was a *spiritual* Messiah, a personal Savior, someone who would free them from sin and judgment and hell.

As Jesus approached Jerusalem, coming down the Mount of Olives with Jerusalem in view just across the valley, and with all the people still surrounding him, he burst into tears.

Let's read about Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41-44:

⁴¹ And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side ⁴⁴ and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:41-44)

Introduction

Eric Wilson, professor of English at Wake Forest University, wanted to become a happier person. He at least wanted a smile on his face, rather than the scowl people were used to seeing. Friends urged

him on to a sunny disposition. He purchased books to become happy, watched only uplifting movies, and inserted “Great!” and “Wonderful!” into his conversations.

But none of these things helped, and the professor eventually went back to being his usual melancholy self.

Turning against what he calls “the happiness movement,” he wrote a book titled *Against Happiness*. He believes Americans are fixated on happiness – to the extent of even fostering “a craven disregard” for whatever shows a mere hint of melancholy.

The happiness movement bloomed in the 1990s, motivated by scientific studies on the brain and the rise of “positive psychology.” But now there’s a backlash against a philosophy that says “normal sadness is something to be smothered, even shunned.” Further study has actually discovered that “being happier is not always better.” Those who know some discontent are motivated to improve their lot in life and the condition of their community.

“If you’re totally satisfied with your life and with how things are going in the world, you don’t feel very motivated to work for change,” says Ed Diener, an author who has written a book similar to Wilson’s. Diener notes that when experiencing a negative mood, “you become more analytical, more critical, and more innovative. You need negative emotions, including sadness, to direct your thinking.”¹

Jesus, of course, had perfect emotions. He did not need to read on how to become happy. Interestingly, the Bible never records Jesus as smiling or laughing. No doubt he did smile and laugh because that is a perfectly good emotion.

Nevertheless, the Bible does record Jesus as weeping. He wept when his friend Lazarus died (John 11:35) and, of course, he wept in our present text. And so, when we read about Jesus weeping, we should pay attention because it teaches us something very important about Jesus and about us.

¹ Sharon Begley, “Happiness: Enough Already,” *Newsweek* (2-11-08), 50-52.

Lesson

Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem in Luke 19:41-44 shows us the compassion of Jesus.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Jesus Weeps for Unrepentant Sinners (19:41-42)
2. Jesus Warns Unrepentant Sinners (19:43-44)

I. Jesus Weeps for Unrepentant Sinners (19:41-42)

First, Jesus weeps for unrepentant sinners.

In the previous pericope (Luke 19:28-40) Jesus had just walked from Jericho to Jerusalem, a distance of about 17 miles. This journey took place on what we call Palm Sunday. As Jesus and his disciples drew near to Bethphage and Bethany on the east side of Jerusalem, he sent two disciples ahead of him to get a donkey's colt. You may recall, if you were here the last time I preached, that Jesus' use of a donkey's colt was a deliberate claim to be king. He was fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9, which states, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Jesus wanted to assert his kingship, and that he was a king coming in love and peace. And, of course, this was not lost on the people in Jerusalem.

The two disciples got the colt, brought it to Jesus, and set him upon it. By this time the crowd was growing larger and larger. People were throwing their cloaks as well as palm branches on the ground. They were rejoicing and praising God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen Jesus do.

The Pharisees tried to stop Jesus' disciples from their exuberant display of praise. But Jesus said that if the people stopped praising him, the very stones would cry out in praise to him.

Then Luke said in verse 41 that **when Jesus drew near and saw the city, he wept over it.** The Greek word for **wept** (*eklausen*) means

“to sob, i.e. wail aloud.”² Jesus was not sniffing or teary-eyed. No, this was a full-throated bawl. Jesus was powerfully moved to tears and lament as he entered the city of Jerusalem. Commentator Philip Ryken says, “What some people still regard as a triumphal entry was, for Jesus, a tearful entry.”³

But why did Jesus weep? Darrell Bock says, “These are the tears of one who knows that the people have already turned their backs on God’s messenger. Much like a parent watching a child make a foolish decision, Jesus mourns a city sealing its fate (cf. 13:34).”⁴

Jesus himself said this to you the city of Jerusalem in verse 42, **“Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.”** Jesus was saying that he had come to Jerusalem with a message of peace. But the people rejected his message.

The **“things that make for peace,”** as Jesus called them, are faith and repentance. People are able to enter into peace with God when they have faith in Jesus, like the blind man on the Jericho road, and repentance for sin, like Zacchaeus when he climbed down from the sycamore tree and had Jesus come into his home. The **things that make for peace** are turning from sin and looking to Jesus for salvation. It is stepping off the throne and letting Jesus take his rightful seat on the throne of our lives.

That was the message that Jesus had been preaching for three years. He had proclaimed the good news that sinners are able to come into a right relationship with God. He demonstrated that he was indeed the Messiah sent by God to seek and to save the lost by miracles. Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead, and exercised control over nature itself. How could anyone miss who Jesus was?

² James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 42.

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 340.

⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1560.

And yet the people did. They rejected his message. And they rejected his person. They would not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and Savior of sinners sent by God to seek and to save the lost. They were so close to Jesus that they could see him and speak to him and touch him, but in the end they rejected him and his message of salvation. That is why Jesus wept for unrepentant sinners.

What about you? What do you think of Jesus? Is he someone whom you admire, but you do not believe his message?

In the late 1940s, Charles Templeton was a close friend and preaching associate of Billy Graham. He effectively preached the gospel to large crowds in major arenas. However, intellectual doubts began to nag at him. He questioned the truth of Scripture and other core Christian beliefs. He finally abandoned his faith and made an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Billy to do the same. He felt sorry for Billy and commented, "He committed intellectual suicide by closing his mind." Templeton resigned from the ministry and became a novelist and news commentator. He also wrote a critique of the Christian faith, *Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith*.

Journalist Lee Strobel interviewed him for his book, *The Case for Faith*. Templeton was 83 and suffering from Alzheimer's disease. He revealed some of the reasons he left the faith:

I started considering the plagues that sweep across parts of the planet and indiscriminately kill – more often than not, painfully – all kinds of people, the ordinary, the decent, and the rotten. And it just became crystal clear to me that it is not possible for an intelligent person to believe that there is a deity who loves.

Lee Strobel then asked him about Jesus and was surprised at the response. Templeton believed Jesus lived but never really considered himself to be God:

He was the greatest human being who has ever lived. He was a moral genius. His ethical sense was unique. He was the intrinsically wisest person that I've ever encountered in my life or in my readings.

He's the most important thing in my life. I know it may sound strange, but I have to say I *adore* him! Everything good I know, everything decent I know, everything pure I know, I learned from Jesus. He is the most important human being who has ever existed. And if I may put it this way, *I miss him*.

Templeton's eyes filled with tears and he wept freely. He refused to say more.⁵

Jesus wept for the unrepentant citizens of Jerusalem. He wept for Charles Templeton. And he still weeps today for unrepentant sinners who turn their backs on God's messenger. He weeps for people who refuse to repent of their sin and believe in him.

II. Jesus Warns Unrepentant Sinners (19:43-44)

And second, Jesus warns unrepentant sinners.

Jesus did not only weep for unrepentant sinners because of their rejection of him. He wept also because of the suffering that their rejection would bring upon them. And that is why he warned them of the grave danger of rejecting him. He said in verses 43-44, **"For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."**

Jesus spoke these words on April 2, 30 AD. Forty years later every single word came true. Philip Ryken put it this way:

With perfect foreknowledge, the Son of God was prophesying what would happen when Jerusalem was conquered by the Romans in 70 AD. The city was surrounded as the general Titus set up giant siege works around its walls. The stones of the city were torn down, the temple was destroyed, and the streets ran red with the blood of women and children. Caesar wanted to make it impossible for anyone

⁵ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 7-23.

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to believe that Jerusalem had ever been inhabited. To that end, Titus tore everything down except for three large towers. These he left standing to show how great the city had been and thus to prove the superior power of Rome. According to Josephus, the devastation was so complete that when the general saw it, he “threw his arms heavenward, uttered a groan, and called God to witness that this was not his doing.”⁶

God has created every one of us to worship him. He alone is worthy of our adoration and worship. He calls his creatures to submit to him and to give him our complete allegiance. When we do not submit to him and worship him as he requires, we should not be surprised when he punishes us for our rebellion against him.

God does not wish that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (cf. 2 Peter 3:9). And Jesus is like his Father, and wept when he saw the unrepentant sinners of Jerusalem. We should never believe that God is cold-hearted toward unrepentant sinners. He has shown us his heart in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus wept for Jerusalem. And he still weeps for unrepentant sinners today. And part of the reason for his weeping is because he knows that judgment is coming. Just as surely as Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD, so an eternal destruction awaits every sinner who refuses to believe in Jesus and turn from sin.

And it will do no good on the Day of Judgment for a person to say that they did not have enough information. Friends, Jesus preached to the citizens of Jerusalem in person. He healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead, and exercised control over nature itself. And God has left a witness to himself in his Word. People have the Word of God about the way of salvation. So, the message pointing to Jesus and his salvation is clear for anyone who will repent and believe.

On May 7, 1915, the R.M.S Lusitania, a British ocean liner, was struck by a torpedo from a German submarine. The ship sank in a

⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 341.

matter of minutes, killing 1198 of the 1959 passengers aboard. In her book, *Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy*, author Diana Preston recorded the observations of one passenger, bookseller Charles Lauriat:

As the ship was sinking and as Lauriat looked around to see who needed life jackets, he noticed that among the crowds now pouring on deck nearly everyone who passed by him that was wearing a life jacket had it on incorrectly. In his panic, one man had thrust one arm through an armhole and his head through the other. Others rushed past wearing them upside down. No one had read the “neat little signs” around the ship telling people how to put them on. Lauriat tried to help, but some thought he was trying to take their life jackets from them and fled in terror.

Preston continues: “Dead and drowning people were ‘dotting the sea like seagulls.’ Many bodies were floating upside down because people had put their life jackets on the wrong way up. . . so that their heads were pushed under the water.”⁷

Jesus was sent by God to seek and to save the lost. His ministry of word and deed was intended to help people recognize him as the Messiah, the Savior sinners. But instead people refused his help, and just a few days later turned against him and had him crucified.

What about you? Do you ignore the “signs” in God’s Word and choose to live your life with your life jacket on the wrong way? There is only one Mediator between God and man, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through him.

Jesus warned the unrepentant sinners of Jerusalem about the destruction of the city. That was a prophetic warning of the judgment that comes upon all people who will not repent of their sins.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Jesus’ weeping over Jerusalem in

⁷ Diana Preston, *Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy* (Berkley Trade, 2002), 206, 246.

Luke 19:41-44, we should submit to him as the Messiah.

In her book *Either Way, I Win: God's Hope for Difficult Times*, Lois Walfrid Johnson writes about visiting Oklahoma City, a city that was changed forever by the terrorist bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, which killed 168 people:

In the national memorial building on the Murrah Building site, 168 empty chairs are placed in the location where each person sat when he or she died.

Beyond that memorial and across another street is a statue constructed by St. Joseph's Catholic Church. The statue's powerful image represents a tall, white-robed Christ. He stands with his back to the busy street and the place where the federal building once stood. The representation of Christ faces a brick wall in which there are 168 empty spaces; one space for each person who died. With bowed head Jesus faces that symbol of loss, covers his face with one hand, and weeps.

In whatever suffering we know, in whatever "Why, God?" we ask, we cannot forget one important truth: Jesus Christ weeps with us.⁸

But Jesus not only weeps with us in our suffering; he also weeps for us in our unrepentance. And he warns us that judgment awaits all those who refuse to repent.

So, how should we respond? There are two responses to Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem.

First, if you have never submitted to Jesus, do so today. Today is the day of salvation. Do not put it off. Do not delay. You do not know the time of your visitation. That is, you do not know when you will die and stand before God. Submit to Jesus today by turning to him in faith and repenting of your sin. Believe that he died to pay the penalty for sin, even your sin, and then turn from your sin and start living wholeheartedly for him.

⁸ Lois Walfrid Johnson, *Either Way, I Win: God's Hope for Difficult Times* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 2000) 50-51.

And the second response is for those of us who are Christians, for those of us who have put our faith in Jesus and repented of our sin. When was the last time that you wept for people who do not know Jesus? Do you have a gut-wrenching compassion for those who are still lost in their sins and on their way to an eternity in hell? Bishop J. C. Ryle said, “We know but little of true Christianity, if we do not feel a deep concern about the souls of unconverted people. A lazy indifference about the spiritual state of others, may doubtless save us much trouble. To care nothing whether our neighbors are going to heaven or hell, is no doubt the way of the world.” But this attitude, says Bishop Ryle, is “very unlike Christ. If Christ felt tenderly about wicked people, the disciples of Christ ought to feel likewise.”⁹

You say, “I don’t know how tell my unconverted friends about Jesus.” Well, in two weeks we are started Christianity Explored on Sunday evenings for seven weeks. That will not only be a great help to you as you learn to share your faith with your unconverted friends, but it will be a great blessing to you as you learn about who Jesus is and what he did to seek and to save the lost. So, sign up today. Amen.

⁹ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1879), 314.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAYER:

Our Father, your Son, as the Lord Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem as King of kings and Lord of lords on that first Palm Sunday he burst into tears. He was sobbing for unrepentant sinners because they would not turn to him in faith and repentance.

O God, will you enable any person who has not yet become a Christian turn to Jesus in faith and repentance today? Will you help that person trust in Jesus as the way and the truth and the life, and the only one who can save? And will you help that person to turn from sin and live a life of wholehearted obedience to you.

And Father, will you also help us who are already Christians to have a heart of compassion for unconverted people? Will you clear away the obstacles so that we can receive training at Christianity Explored and learn to share our faith with unconverted people?

And for this I pray in your name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!