

WHY JESUS WEPT

Luke 19:41-48

It's disturbing, isn't it? The sight of Jesus weeping? We don't usually think of Jesus as the emotional type. We'll talk about His weeping over the tomb of Lazarus as evidence of His true humanity, but the picture we have in our minds is still of a man who is strong and serious, calm and collected. I suppose it's a bit like seeing your dad cry. Not only is it rare, but when you see it you know something's not right.

So, why did Jesus weep on this occasion? What was going on that He broke into tears at the sight of Jerusalem, the City of David? In verse 42 of our Gospel lesson, He says, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!" He's speaking to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, lamenting the fact that

They would not believe.

Just before this, Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem, humble, and mounted on a donkey. As He had drawn near, the whole multitude of His disciples had begun to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! *Peace* in heaven and glory in the highest!" Listen carefully, and you can hear echoes of the angelic host, who sang on the night of Jesus' birth, "Glory to God in the highest, and *peace* on earth among those with whom He is pleased!" What, then, makes for peace? Jesus! "He Himself is our peace," writes the apostle Paul (Eph. 2:14). He has made peace by the blood of His cross, God the Father reconciling all things to Himself through His Son, even we, who were by nature hostile toward Him, enemy soldiers in a war that we started.

And the terms of this peace? Repent and believe. "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law" (Rom. 3:28). Jesus came to preach the good news that God doesn't accept us because of anything *we* do, but through faith alone in what He has done *for* us. Like Abraham, our faith is counted to us as righteousness, although we are far from righteous ourselves. "Therefore, since we have been justified by *faith*, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). The law has no power to forgive. Only the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

But not everyone did. Some rejected Jesus' terms. It's not that they didn't *know* what made for peace. They simply refused to believe it. In the very next chapter, Jesus tells the following parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. When the time came, he sent a servant to the

tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him" (20:9-18).

Psalm 80 speaks of Israel as a vine that God brought out of Egypt and planted in Canaan, the Promised Land. That would make God the vinedresser. The servants are the prophets, like Jeremiah, who hung a chain on his neck when he prophesied that the king of Babylon would overpower the nations; or Ezekiel, who did all kinds of weird stuff, like draw Jerusalem on a brick and lay siege to it with little toy armies and battering rams, when he prophesied that the city would be led away captive to Babylon. But no one listened. All God's prophets were ignored. They were wounded and cast out, until finally God sent His beloved Son, who came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. So intent were they on pursuing righteousness as if it were based on works, determined to earn the inheritance themselves, they *crucified* the Prince of Peace.

And, as Jesus *continues* to say through tears,

There would be consequences.

"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" (vv. 43-44).

This word was fulfilled about 40 years later. The Jewish historian Josephus records that governor Florus, one of Pontius Pilate's successors, greatly aggravated the Jews by having their leaders executed, without the orders of Caesar. The Jews responded by rebelling against the Romans, no longer giving to Caesar what is Caesar's, but withholding his tax, burning imperial buildings, overturning their sacrifices, etc. So, the emperor Vespasian ordered his son Titus to march up to Jerusalem and lay siege to it, set up a barricade around it and surround it and hem it in on every side, like a pillow so that none of the stuffing comes out, only the stuffing is people. This happened right around the time of the Passover, when Jews from all over the Empire

would have been staying there for the feast. Josephus estimates the number to have been more than 300,000.

First came the famine, which was so great, he says, that good friends often fought over a piece of bread. People were forced to eat their shoes and the leather from their belts, as well as hay, manure, dung, and even their own children. This led to terrible disease, which took the lives of many. Finally, on September 8, five months after the siege began, the Romans stormed the city and laid waste to everything, tearing down walls and houses, the temple, leaving no stone upon another. Those who survived were taken prisoner and sold as slaves.

But the Romans weren't acting alone. This was, in fact, *God's* doing. It happened according to His will. Like the Assyrians and Babylonians before them, the Romans were simply the hammer God chose to crush His people. And why? Because they did not know the time of their visitation. Because they *should* have known, having received so many warnings about what was coming, but refused to believe the things that make for peace.

To be sure, this is a warning for us, too. Last week, we heard Paul say, "let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Every temptation is common to man, including the temptation to cast off Christ. Faith is a gift. By *grace* you have been saved. But how easily one can be deceived and misled into seeking to establish their *own* righteousness, whether by God's law or by some worldly standard. But there is no salvation apart from Christ. There is only punishment. And if we refuse the terms of peace, if we refuse to repent and believe in the gospel, then what happened to Jerusalem will one day happen to us *spiritually*. We will be surrounded and hemmed in on every side, sold as slaves to our adversary the devil, and we will die eternally.

And this is why Jesus weeps:

This is not what Jesus wants.

When He says all this, He begins by saying, "*Would* that you...had known..." (v.42). He doesn't *delight* in what's happened, but He expresses an earnest desire that things were *different*. "As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33:11). He's not Jonah, looking down on the city of Nineveh, waiting eagerly for God's wrath to fall upon it (Jonah 4:5). God seriously desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4), and it grieves Him when they won't. We are all His creatures. He formed us in the womb. He bled and died for us on the cross.

So, while God does punish, this is what Luther called His “alien work,” as in strange, foreign, not intrinsic to His character. This is not what God would prefer to be doing. He is just, and so He must. Sin is serious. It is not a joke. But He would much rather be rejoicing with the angels over sinners who repent. That is why He spoke to His people of old by the prophets, and why, in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son: to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. He is patient toward us, as Peter writes in his second epistle, “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (3:9). He gave Jerusalem 40 years, didn’t He? He didn’t come down with guns blazing the minute Jesus ascended. He is *merciful*. He refrains from giving sinners what they justly deserve for the sake of saving more of them.

And that’s a comfort to us, especially we who feel the pain of having people in our lives who *don’t* believe. Maybe they did once. They came to church, they were confirmed, etc. But then something happened. They fell away because they had no root, or they were choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and now they no longer know the things that make for peace. We worry about them. We *weep* for them, because we know what the alternative is. We know what God must do if they persist on this path.

But know this: when you weep, Jesus weeps with you. This is not what He wants. And as much as you love this person, God loves them even more. He became flesh for them. He was pierced for them. He bore their sin. He carried their shame. And He paid for it all with His precious blood. And even if they’re not pursuing Him, He is pursuing them, just as He pursued Adam and Eve in the garden; or Jacob, on the run from Esau; or Moses in Midian; or us, coming down from heaven to trade His life for His enemies’. He pursues us even now, coming to us by His Word and Spirit and in with and under bread and wine. Just because Jesus weeps doesn’t mean He’s given up.

And neither should you. We have a gracious God, who knows His own and His own know Him. He is patient toward us, His Word works, and He hears our prayers. Jesus wept. But this is not disturbing. It is *encouraging*. In those tears, we see that God wants us to live. That while we were enemies He brought terms of peace, and even when we rejected those terms, He went to the cross to save us anyway. God have mercy on us and bring us to tears of repentance always, that He may one day wipe away *every* tear from our eyes when He comes again to establish peace forevermore.

In ☩ Jesus’ name. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria