

Jesus Wept

Text: Luke 19:41-48

Hymn: "The Church's One Foundation" (*LSB* 644)

Surely we all have our favorite kings and queens from ancient lore. For you Anglophiles, it might be Queen Victoria or one of the Queens Elizabeth or King Henry V or even King Arthur (if he really ever existed). For you Francophiles, it might be Charles the Bald or Charles the Fat or Charles the Simple (the French had a good sense of humor). Maybe it's Frederick Barbarossa of Germany or Maximilian I or Wilhelm I; or one of the Chin dynasty emperors, from which China gets its name.

I'm not a Scandinavian but one of *my* favorites is the Viking King Canute who ruled from a.d. 1016 until his death in 1035. He ruled over not only Denmark but also Norway, England, and Scotland. He was also the first Norse King to become truly Christian and insisted on rebuilding all of the missions and churches that had been torn down by the marauding Vikings prior to his rule. Because of his popular and successful reign, he was perceived by many of his subjects to be just about invincible. And so to convince his subjects that he was not indeed invincible, he one day ordered that on the ocean's shore, right at the water's edge, be placed his throne, in which he then proceeded to sit. Needless to say, as the tides rose, the defiant waves lapped back and forth and drenched everything, including King Canute's chair and him in it. But the king just sat there. The legend goes that he sat there weeping, not in fear, not in frustration that the tide wouldn't obey when he commanded it to stop—he knew from the outset that it wouldn't. He wept because as he sat there he reflected on his own King. He thought about the Lord Jesus, who could silence the wind and the waves and command

them to stop but set aside His majesty and power so that He could become man, so that He, the King of kings, could weep for Canute, could bleed for Canute, could die for him.

Canute was so moved by the experience of it all that afterwards he took off his crown and placed it on a statue of the crucified Christ and never wore it again.¹ It would be good for all of us next time we find ourselves near the sea—on a trip to Galveston or Corpus Christi—to stand on the shore and to watch the tide going in and out, the cadence of it reminding us all of our own mortality; perhaps we too would weep to think that He who with a single word could still those waves, reverse their roll, once vacated His royal throne so that He could come and weep and bleed and die for us.

Or perhaps we could take ourselves to some high place, the top of Reunion Tower or the top floors of one of Dallas's downtown skyscrapers and look down on the city and weep, at least inside, to think of the teeming masses of people who still reject our Lord Jesus today, even as He wept, pausing at the Mount of Olives to overlook the city of His rejection so long ago. There at Jerusalem had lived and reigned the greatest of kings—King David, Solomon, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Josiah. There had spoken the great prophets—Nathan and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Zechariah. Never had there been a city like this holy Jerusalem with such a past. Yet because of their rejection of the true Messiah, of God in the flesh coming for them, it became a city of impending doom. No wonder that when he came upon the city He wept over it. He explains why:

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

¹ Henry of Huntingdon (1084?-1155), *The History of the English People, 1000-1154* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 17-18. The story is sometimes told as a moral against pride, as if Canute believed the sea would obey him, but in the earliest versions Canute was not self-deluded but sought to teach his flatterers a lesson.

will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation (vv 43-44).

Little more than thirty years after Jesus wept, on the very ground where His donkey paused, the tenth Roman legion was encamped. You know what it was doing there. It was shutting off every supply to the city of Jerusalem. The Roman general Titus encircled it with a palisade, a fence of pointed stakes on which would later hang the thousands of bodies of those that tried to escape the famine within the enclosed city. The city was finally razed and burned to the ground, and history tells us that when Titus entered the city he was sickened by the sight of what he, a battle-hardened Roman general, saw. All because “you, O Jerusalem, knew not the time of your visitation.”

How many people today still refuse to see this day as the day of their Lord’s gracious visitation? How many children today in neighborhoods around this church, in the neighborhoods in which you live, do not know Christ crucified because they’re deprived of knowing him, who will never sing “Jesus Loves Me” or “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” or “Lamb of God, You Take Away the Sin of the World.” How many men and women—our colleagues at work, our friends—are striving with such dedicated fervor to “lay up for themselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy” only to refuse the imperishable gift which Christ has reserved in heaven for all of those who love him? How many lives are littered with disposable relationships and broken promises that have left in their wake only devastation for themselves and others?

And yet there stands before them One who wept for the world, One who says, “Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” rest for the restless, the One who wants to establish an eternal relationship with them and

who offers them things that will never be destroyed, promises never to be broken. Will they miss this day of His gracious visitation?

Joseph Addison Alexander once wrote,

There is a time, we know not when,
 A point we know not where,
 That marks the destiny of men
 To glory or despair.
 There is a line by us unseen,
 That crosses every path;
 The hidden boundary between
 God's patience and his wrath.

There are so many who need to know that *this* day is the day of the Lord's gracious visitation, so many who need to know that beyond the story of Jesus weeping over the city there is an even greater story that unfolds. No story about a man's love for others is greater and more important to each and every one of us than the true story of what happened to Jesus after He entered into Jerusalem on that day of His rejection. Beyond the weeping of the Mount of Olives, on another mount called Golgotha, the greatest story ever told takes place. On the Mount of Olives Jesus sheds sympathetic tears. On the Mount called Golgotha, Jesus sheds sacrificial blood. On the Mount of Olives Jesus cries. On the Mount called Golgotha Jesus dies for your sins, for mine and for those of the whole world.

The city over which Jesus wept should have given him the key to the city; instead they gave him a cross. But this is the way God so often works things—despite man, despite man's sin, and in fact *for* man's sin, that very cross became the key by which the doors of the eternal city would be opened for all mankind, for all who by faith know that same Jesus Christ, the same Christ that came into Jerusalem not to be the conquering king but to be the suffering servant and the Savior of the world.

I began with a king who wept. Let me end with a woman who wept. She was sitting on a park bench in Washington, D.C.; she had come to the capital hoping to see the President. She wasn't allowed entry at the front gate and no one would stop to listen to her. Her husband was in prison and she and her children were starving and cold. Now she, with her children beside her, was just sitting on a bench, weeping. A little boy came up to her and asked, "Why are you crying?" Moved by the woman's story, the young boy immediately turned around, walked past the guards of the White House, and proceeded to the Oval Office, where the president was conferring with advisors. All conversation stopped as the young boy jumped on the President's lap and said, "Daddy, there's a woman here to meet you and I think you should listen." After trying to put him off but the son insisting all the more, President Lincoln finally relented, heard the woman out, and at the end agreed to set her husband free, all because the son of the President had taken a sympathetic interest in her plight.²

The Son of God has taken more than simply a sympathetic interest in your plight, because mere words or even a sympathetic ear on your behalf were not enough to gain your release, not enough at all. He put Himself in our place. He put Himself on our Cross. He was there executed for our transgressions. He put Himself where we deserved to be so that we someday might be where He is now. That's why having paused with Jesus as He wept on the Mount of Olives we can also rejoice, now and always, that Jesus did not stop there but rode on to die. Today is the day of His visitation. Thanks be to God!

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² John D. Weaver, *Tad Lincoln, Mischief-Maker in the White House* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1963), p. 98.