

Sunday, March 28, 2021

The Tears of God

(Tears, Ashes, and Trumpets; Message 6)

(Palm Sunday, 2021)

Luke 19:28-44; Text: 19:41

Scripture:

²⁸After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰“Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ say, ‘The Lord needs it.’”

³²Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴They replied, “The Lord needs it.”

³⁵They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

*³⁸“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”^[a]
“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples!”

⁴⁰“I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.”

⁴¹As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴²and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. ⁴⁴They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

Message:

In the mountains near Cherokee, North Carolina, there is dramatic production held throughout the summer in a large outdoor theatre called, *Unto The Hills*.

It is the story of the Cherokee Indians and the events that led to the “trail of tears.” It is a story that has been shared with millions since it first started in 1950.

The “trail of tears” is the story of state and local militias forcibly removing the Cherokee Indians from their homes and land to a designated territory west of the Mississippi. That “forced march” occurred in 1838. Along the “trail” as many as 6000 died from disease, starvation, deprivation, and abuse.

It is a story of injustice, pain and suffering of the Cherokee – a pattern repeated numerous times in American history. The atrocities were so horrible, lament and tears are the only proper response. Most walk out of the theatre with tears in their eyes.

If there are no tears, there is either a lack of understanding or a troubling callousness; both are disturbing.

In Luke 19, Jesus has come back to his beloved city of Jerusalem for Passover.

There are three major events recorded by Luke here: Jesus’ Messianic and Triumphant Arrival (which we tend to focus on), the Table Turning in the Temple (which fascinates us but seems somehow out of character for Jesus) and Jesus’ Weeping over Jerusalem (which is largely ignored).

As Jesus descends down the Mount of Olives to the jubilant shouts of a large crowd; they lay down their cloaks and palm branches as he passed. The passage finds Jesus fulfilling **Zechariah’s (9:9)** prophecy: *“See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

The descent provides a magnificent overview of the Temple and whole city of Jerusalem which, at Passover, had swelled to six times its normal size (**PIC**). Together, Jerusalem and the Temple, represent the heart and soul of Judaism.

And then, Jesus begins to weep (**19:41**). What?! In the middle of a Parade?! Yes. This is a picture of prophetic lament, reminiscent of Habakkuk and OT prophets; but these are also the tears of the God of the universe... Judgement is coming; Jesus weeps as he sees the needless pain and suffering his people will soon endure because of their continual foolish rebellion against him.

We confess our God is the creator and sustainer of the universe; our source of value, purpose and meaning; the one who is loving, kind and gracious. We confess God as judge; omnipotent and omniscient; our refuge and strength.

These images are all true, but incomplete; God is also the one who weeps, who laments, over the sin, misunderstanding, disobedience and rejection of his people.

In **Luke 19**, God cries out over their unrighteousness and impending judgement. Jesus of Nazareth will illustrate with thorns, nails, and a crossbeam that in the heart of a sovereign, omnipotent, omnipresent God, there is deep longing to bring forgiveness, reconciliation, hope and healing to his people.

The question is “Why?” The answer is significant.

(Jesus saw their) MISUNDERSTANDING

Tears welled up in the eyes of Jesus as he looked over the *City of Peace*, because he saw their misunderstanding. (19:42 - “If you, even you, had known on this day what would bring peace...”).

It is not like they had never been told. They had been told – over and over and over. Abraham told them. Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Habakkuk and Daniel told them. **Hosea**, speaking for God, said, “*My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge. I also reject you....*” (4:6).

Our world has been repeatedly told: preachers and prophets, churches and crusades, endless translations and various technologies; as have you and I; we are without excuse.

In **Ezekiel 33:11**, God pleads, “*Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn back from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?’*” (Note this is addressed to God’s people, not unbelievers!)

The People of God (Old Testament Jews; New Testament Christians) don’t have a great track record. Christians dishonor their parents, kill, steal, lie, covet and are unchaste just like unbelievers (but when Christians do it, they violate the essence of their faith). Christians can be angry, judgmental, hypocritical, racist, sexist, and abusive – just like unbelievers (but when Christians do it, they violate the essence of their faith). Christians can be manipulative, demeaning, controlling and insensitive – just like unbelievers (but when Christians do it, they violate the essence of their faith).

God loves us with a love greater than we can even imagine. He created us to be loved and to love; but we really messed up; as a result, we deserved to die, but instead of death, God made us an irresistible offer: He would send his only son to die on a cross for us – to take the penalty for our sin on himself. We just need to trust him with our whole heart and life...

If you were the only person on the face of this earth, Jesus would have come for you – to give you new life... (That is who our God is!). If we said, “I’m not

good enough...deserving enough...worth enough," that would all be true! God said, *"I love you so much none of that matters. Just follow me."*

And now you know...again.

And yet, there are people today who have heard this who will walk away... and persist in their rebellion, unbelief and disobedience. Jesus saw their lack of understanding – even after being told repeatedly – and wept.

Today, Jesus stands outside our hearts, homes and cities, waiting to be invited in. And he weeps. Jesus still weeps.

(Jesus saw their) DISOBEDIENCE

Tears welled up in the eyes of Jesus as he looked over the *City of Peace*, because he saw their disobedience. (19:42 - *"If you, even you, had known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes"*).

Or as James said: *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it – not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do"* (**James 1:22-25**).

As Christians, many of us having sat under the teaching of God's Word for decades; we have a lot of stored up knowledge. What are we doing with it?

As Christians we know what we should do; but are we doing it? We know what God says about compassion, about caring for the poor and widows. We know what God says about proclaiming the Gospel to our neighbor. We know what God says about extending grace and forgiveness to one another. We know what God says about sacrifice, giving, discipleship, obedience. But what are we doing about them? Knowledge plus obedience means righteousness.

Jesus stood outside the city of Jerusalem, looking over his people who knew more about God than any other people in history but who lacked obedience... Knowledge without obedience means disobedience; disobedience brings judgement.

It sounds a lot like our world today; even many of those who call themselves "Christians" are not "doers" of the word; God can't tolerate disobedience. Jesus saw their lack of obedience even after repeated warnings, and wept. Jesus sees our hearts, homes and cities, and he still weeps.

(Jesus saw their) REJECTION

Tears welled up in the eyes of Jesus as he looked over the City of Peace, because he saw their rejection. The day Jesus entered the city triumphantly was the first day of Passover Week and the day Jews everywhere selected their sacrificial lamb.

On "*Lamb Selection Day*," each family was to select an "unblemished" lamb to be sacrificed, its blood shed for their "salvation" as God's people.

As Jesus rode down the Mount of Olives from the East, the place from which the Jews knew Messiah would come, he is saying, "*Here I am, the unblemished Lamb of God, on my way to the throne by way of sacrifice and shed blood* (the cross). Will you choose me as your lamb, as your sacrifice (i.e., as your Savior?). Will you choose me to be your King (i.e., as your Lord?)

Most who greeted Jesus that day were looking for their Messiah. Most of them were looking for a political leader, for a political solution. They waved a nationalistic symbol – the palm branch; they chanted together a political chorus, "*Hosannah to the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosannah to David!*" They thought they had it all figured out. They were going to make Jesus their Messiah – but only if he followed their plan, use military might, and use it against their oppressors, the Romans.

They tried to make Jesus something he was not; it is an all-too-common hobby today to frame Jesus into someone we can be comfortable with (i.e., agrees with us).

- If we want Jesus to forgive our sins, we need to obey his command to love our enemies, turn the other cheek, pray for those who persecute us.
- If we want Jesus to help us in our distresses, we must also heed his call to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the poor, and visit the prisoner.
- If we want Jesus to confront evil and injustice, we need to accept him as the one who touched the unclean, associated with sinners, and wept with the brokenhearted.

(If kingdom living ever gets comfortable, we're probably in the wrong kingdom).

They missed the whole point. They wanted a liberator, not a lamb. They wanted a victorious conqueror, not a crucified King. They said "no."

And that is the point. They were looking for someone different, someone they wanted rather than someone they needed. They rejected Jesus. And His Way. And His Truth. And His Life.

You can well imagine the tears welling up in Jesus' eyes as he looks over the city of peace, and the rejection of his people begins to set in...

Jesus was the Way, the Truth, and Life. Jesus is the only way for people to be reconciled to his Father, their only hope, their only salvation.

As Jesus looked over *City of Zion*, he knew it would be just days before they would cry, "*crucify him, crucify him!*" He would hang on a cross just outside the city wall.

- They *did not recognize the time of God's coming...*" (**19:44c**)
- He would be "*despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem*" (**Isaiah 53:3**).
- **John (1:9-11)** would describe his pain: "*The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people [rejected] him.*"

Knowing he had been rejected and judgement would now be coming, Jesus wept. Knowing they had rejected their only hope for forgiveness, Jesus wept.

Judgement would come with a vengeance (**19:43-44** - *The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and your children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another...*).

That prophecy would come true in an astounding and startling way just days before Passover, 70AD, Jerusalem and the Temple (bursting with Jews from all over the world) – the heart and soul of Israel - were surrounded by the Romans.

Over the next few months of the siege, the Roman Legions would completely destroy everything – no stone was left unturned, literally. Along with everyone in it; it is said over a million men, women and children died from violence and ensuing famine...

The price of misunderstanding, disobedience, and rejecting the Lamb of God is catastrophic, excruciating, and eternal.

(Don't miss Jesus') TEARS

Tears welled up in the eyes of Jesus. He was moved to **compassion.**

Jesus sees their past history of misunderstanding, disobedience and rejection of the prophets, their current misunderstanding, disobedience and rejection of God's Son... and Jesus sees the future - the impending starvation, pain and suffering, and death. And Jesus weeps. The tears of Jesus were tears of compassion...

Life is hard for everyone – including Christians (sometimes, especially for Christians). As a pastor, people have been open with me about their secrets, allowed me to see (not only beyond the physical masks, but) behind their virtual masks as well. I have buried too many babies, followed up on too many suicides, listened to countless confessions, and witnessed a whole lot of pain. Over the past couple of weeks, we seem to have experienced an extraordinary amount of loss and pain. We grieve. We live in a place of great pain – Our world is hard.

We've asked this question often: If God is good and all powerful, why is there so much suffering and pain in this world? Either God is not good or God is not all-powerful – or we wouldn't have suffering.

Jesus wants us to know he created a world where no one hurt, no one suffered, and no one died...and then someone – like you and me – went and “messed it up.” But the Good News is **one day** it will be like that **again** – because of Jesus.

Jesus wants us to know that God provided a solution to our suffering, death and impending judgement, **his only Son's** suffering and death: “*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!*” Sadly, many have messed that up as well. And Jesus weeps.

Have you ever prayed, “Father, teach me to weep for my sins, so that I might weep for the sins of others?”

If our hearts are tuned to His, his tears will move us to tears. The continuing misunderstanding, disobedience, and rejection in our world should also move us to tears. Our sin and disobedience that sent Jesus to the cross, must move us to tears. Followers of Jesus need to do compassion well. We need to be moved, as Jesus was, by the poor, the broken, and the abused; moved as Jesus was to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisons, and minister to the sick that they might see Jesus in us.

These tears of Jesus, God in the flesh, not only say a lot about the God we serve, but they also need to say a lot about the people who serve our God (i.e., you and me). Jesus wants us to know how much he **loves us** as he prepares to die for us. Jesus also wants us to know how much he longs for his tears to move us to tears – so we can also embrace his compassion and obedience.

Jesus wept. He still weeps today. (Don't miss his tears!)