

Sunday, August 16, 2009 Luke 19:41-48

What causes you to cry? Even the most “manly” of men must admit we tear up from time to time. It may be a loss, a disappointment, grief, or simply because we’re feeling sorry for ourselves. When is the last time you wept for someone else? Today let’s **Marvel at Jesus’ Mercy – His tears of sorrow for the lost moved Him to teach the saving gospel truth.**

When Jesus approached Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives on the day we call Palm Sunday, you would expect him to be beaming with joy as he looked forward to a hero’s welcome. But when He saw the full panorama of the city before Him, He wept. He literally burst into sobs. He saw more than the busy streets, the neat homes, and the crowds of people. He could read their hearts and saw pride, self-righteousness, selfishness, and love of this world. He saw a Pharisee praying on the corner of a busy street – and then sneaking off to defraud a widow of her house. He saw a rich man, feasting luxuriously day after day, refusing to give a crumb to a beggar. He saw a woman caught in the act of adultery, about to be stoned by a mob of men as guilty as she. Jerusalem – the city that had Moses, the Prophets, and now the Son of God proclaiming His Word, refused to repent and believe the promises of that Word. Jerusalem, the city of the king’s palace and the golden temple, refused to welcome the King of kings when He came to His temple.

How would you feel if you came home some night after a hard day’s work, tired and longing for a cheerful welcome, but when you try to open the door your family has changed the lock? Despite your knocking and calling, they refuse to open it! Jesus came to Jerusalem, and most of Jerusalem had locked the door of their hearts to Him. They laughed in his face. They condemned and crucified him.

When love is scorned and rejected, it often turns into anger and rage. Tears well up in Jesus’ eyes. He breaks into sobs as they trickle down his cheeks. As true God He could see what lay ahead for Jerusalem. A people that reject God’s mercy will ultimately receive God’s wrath and punishment. The Jews, in their nationalistic pride, increasingly resisted the Roman rule. The fatal Jewish revolt against Rome began in 66 AD and lasted three and one-half years. The Roman general Titus after a lengthy, devastating siege finally forced his way into the city, breaking through its walls. On August 6, in the year 70 AD, his army burned the Temple and leveled it to the ground. The Jewish historian Josephus reports that over 1 million Jews, men, women, and children died in the siege and battle. The Romans took 97,000 as slaves. Jerusalem refused God when He came in grace. They could not, nor can anyone, refuse Him when He comes in judgment.

What does Jesus see when He looks out over our nation? Its gleaming skyscrapers? Its state of the art hospitals? Wall Street and its financial strength? Its scientific and technological wonders? Its proud military history? Its government buildings? Its Bill of Rights? Its freedoms? I’m sure He weeps. A nation so blessed with freedom of worship and Christian influence is abandoning her Savior. As a nation we’re running as fast as we can away from God’s truth in rebellion against Him. Wall Street and economic recovery will provide our daily needs. Technology and science will answer where we came from, why we’re here, and how long we should remain here. Government will provide our all our needs. Living any way we want without those old Ten Commandments making us feel guilty, will finally set us free! Whenever I fly at night and gaze down at all the twinkling lights, I think, “How beautiful!” Then I remember

gleaming in every one of those homes, even in the smallest town, is a TV set spewing so many popular programs that promote sinful sex, idolize human achievement, blaspheme God's holy name, and deny the Bible's truths, and I weep. Don't you?

We weep not only for our own country, but for people we know who have rejected Jesus. They may have had every advantage, baptized in the name of the One True God, brought up in Christian homes, given a Christian education, but today they set their heart on this world's goods. They spend their time pursuing its pleasures. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it." They neither hear nor obey, how can they be among the blessed? Jesus weeps. Won't we also weep?

I recall our synod's first evangelism administrator commenting at an outreach training workshop, "When you think about the fate of unbelievers, you can't help but feel tremendous sorrow. Unless people repent and believe in Jesus, He will condemn them to hell. In heaven I'll have perfect joy, so I know I won't be sad for them then. So now is my time to feel sorrow." At the first confirmation service I officiated after 9/11, I heard the young Christians confess, "I will be faithful to Jesus to the point of death." I couldn't help but tear up as I pondered the evil of Islam growing in influence in North America. I honestly wondered, "Will this be the generation of Christians that faces painful persecution and death for their faith in our own country?"

Is that all? Just weep? Marvel at Jesus' mercy. His tears of sorrow for the lost moved Him to teach the saving gospel truth. Jesus didn't avoid those who rejected Him. He went directly to confront them with the Law and to bring them the saving gospel. He entered the temple area and began driving out those who were selling. **"It is written, He said to them, "My house will be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers!"**

Rather than a place people came to confess their sins, receive God's forgiveness, hear the prophecies of the coming Messiah, and thank Him for His gift of salvation, the leaders had made the temple a place to make themselves wealthy. They made their own laws to enslave the people's consciences. They then robbed them as they implied their offerings and sacrifices could somehow earn God's favor. Jesus taught the true Word in those temple courts during the last week of His earthly ministry. "Woe to you," He condemned the self-righteous. "I have come to save you," He comforted the repentant. Then He willingly sacrificed Himself on the cross to suffer God's condemnation for the sins of the world, so that all who believe in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

I get all steamed up when I see immorality sweeping over our land. I get all agitated when I see so many demonic lies spewing from the churches and public institutions of our land. After marveling at Jesus' mercy again today, moved by His Spirit, I will repent of my own sinful nature's self-righteousness. I'll beg for His mercy, for I deserve His punishment. I'll ask His forgiveness for the many times I reject Him to follow my own way. I will dedicate myself to gladly hearing His Word and receiving His body and blood, for here alone I know His forgiving grace and love. Then I will spend more time shedding tears for those who still reject Jesus. You too? And then? Teach God's saving truth. God's Spirit has blessed you with faith in Jesus for eternal life, so teach your children and grandchildren. Tell your friends and neighbors. Don't avoid the lost; Don't avoid confronting the false teacher. Teach the truth in love. The gospel is God's power for the salvation of everyone who believes it! Speak it with tears if necessary – in love always. Amen.