



## How to Weep Before the Wondrous Cross

### Luke Series #60

Luke 23:26-43

David Sunday

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Please open your Bible to Luke 23. We're going to read Luke's account of the crucifixion. We've been in this Gospel now for one-and-a-half years. I'm sort of sad that our study in Luke is soon coming to an end but am looking forward to the other things God has for us from His Word.

Luke's Gospel has been moving along to this point. Do you remember at the beginning of Luke where Simeon held the baby Jesus in his arms? He said that Jesus would become a sign that is to be opposed. He told Mary, "...a sword will pierce through your own soul also" (Luke 2:35), predicting the sufferings of Christ. All the way through these pages, Luke has kept the cross of Jesus in view. It's been like a landmark on the skyline. Luke never lets our gaze be averted from the cross which has cast its looming shadow upon every step of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. May we never escape or seek to evade the shadow of the cross all the days of our lives.

I read a quote this week from Ann Voskamp that captured me. She said, "The cross isn't only our door into God's presence; the cross is our only air in God's presence." Let's read the story of the cross as if it were our oxygen supply—"our only air in God's presence"—and as if our lives depended on it...because they do.

Let's worship our Savior as we read of what He suffered for us.

*<sup>26</sup> And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. <sup>27</sup> And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. <sup>28</sup> But turning to them Jesus said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. <sup>29</sup> For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'<sup>30</sup> Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' <sup>31</sup> For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"*

*<sup>32</sup> Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. <sup>33</sup> And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they*

*know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. <sup>35</sup> And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” <sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine <sup>37</sup> and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” <sup>38</sup> There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”*

*<sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” <sup>40</sup> But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? <sup>41</sup> And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” <sup>42</sup> And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” <sup>43</sup> And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”*

Thanks be to God for His living Word. Amen.

The vantage points from which we could view this magnificent text are almost limitless. I'm sure we will return to this passage and the passion narratives in the Gospel again and again throughout our lives together as a church but today I want to stand in one place and take in the striking, solemn scene from a single vantage point.

I want to look at the words of Jesus to the daughters of Jerusalem in Luke 23:28-31. These are words that are only recorded in Luke's Gospel. They are words that instruct us in how we should respond to the cross of Jesus. When you and I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, how does this incident affect us? What does it mean? How does it strike us? What does it do to us? How should we respond to and view what happens to Jesus on this occasion? What difference should it make to our lives?

In these words He speaks to the daughters of Jerusalem, Jesus is teaching us how we should think of and respond to His wondrous cross. I'm going to follow the lead of Charles Spurgeon in giving you a simple, two-point outline of the thrust of Jesus' teaching.

- 1. Weep not.**
- 2. Weep.**

That should be simple enough to remember.

## **Weep Not**

Picture the scene before us. Jesus has spent the previous night praying in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Sweat, like drops of blood, poured from Him because of His extreme

agony. He's been mocked repeatedly and has spent time under the custody of soldiers who have beaten Him in the face. People have spat on Him. He's had a crown of thorns pressed into His skull. He's been scourged by the Romans with a whip made of leather and lead balls that have ripped through His skin and tendons. Now the skin on His back is like bloody strips of flesh. He is now so emaciated and beaten down that He is unable to carry the cross beam all the way up Golgotha's hill so they conscript a North African man named Simon of Cyrene who has come in from the country. They lay the cross on Simon to carry it behind Jesus.

*"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!"* (Luke 13:34) In the midst of this gruesome, horrific scene—the darkest day in the history of humanity—we find a welcome relief in Luke 23:27. A great multitude of people are following Jesus and in this crowd are at least some who are not filled with animosity, hatred and rage toward Him. Among this multitude is a group of women who are mourning and lamenting for Him. Luke pays special attention to women in his Gospel and never speaks of them in an unfavorable light.

As we see these women lament and mourn over Jesus, I find myself breathing a sigh of relief. At least someone cares, sympathizes and feels the horror of what is happening. Why are the daughters of Jerusalem weeping? Luke doesn't tell us. Could it be because of the striking character of the Person going all the way to the cross? There was something about Jesus that was magnetic and drew people in. His love, compassion and gentleness caused outcasts and people who were beaten down to be drawn to Him. As they saw this One Who had healed the sick, made the lame to walk and given the blind their sight, could it have been a natural sympathy that arose in their hearts for One Who was so good yet was being treated so badly?

Perhaps they were weeping because He was innocent. Luke is especially concerned with emphasizing Jesus' innocence. In the narrative of His trial, we see again and again that this Man has done nothing wrong. He doesn't deserve what is happening to Him. As they watch Him suffer, they mourn and lament.

I think this is a fitting contrast to the mocking and hatred we have been hearing. That's why the words which come out of Jesus' mouth in Luke 23:28 are sort of shocking and unexpected. We're surprised to hear Jesus as He turns to the women and says, *"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me..."* This is really the last teaching portion of Jesus' life before His death on the cross. Weep not.

Why does Jesus tell them not to weep for Him? They feel sympathy. They weep tears of sadness and mourning. This is the least they can do to come to His defense. They do not understand and have not thought properly or deeply enough about what is going to take place in

just a few moments as Jesus is nailed to that cross. They weep because they do not know what Jesus is doing in this moment.

Jesus doesn't need their sympathy. He does not need anyone's defense. Jesus is going to the cross knowing full well why He is going there and what He is going to accomplish when He dies there. In the words of the Apostle Paul, He is "... [going to give] *himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever*" (Galatians 1:4-5). Jesus is going to go to the cross to be made sin by God. God will make "...*him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus is going to the cross in order to cancel the debt that stands against us—the Law with its legal demands—in order to pay that debt in full. He went so we might sing:

My sin oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
my sin, not in part, but the whole,  
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more;  
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

(It is Well with My Soul by Horatio Gates Spafford, 1873)

Jesus is going to become "...*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world*" (John 1:29). He is going to secure an eternal redemption for all those who believe in Him.

He says to these women, "...*do not weep for me...*" (Luke 23:28). "Do not feel sorry for Me right now." There is an important lesson for us in this. A merely emotional response to the cross is deficient—not enough. Sentimentality is when we feel things without thinking deeply about why we are feeling—when we toss around emotions lightly and are content to experience shallow feelings.

Sentimentality is deceptive. I wouldn't quote him very often in a sermon, but Oscar Wilde got it right when he said this: "A sentimentalist is one who wants to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it." We think we can have our emotions for nothing but we cannot. Even the finest and most self-sacrificing emotions have to be paid for; there has to be depth, reason and transformation that takes place in connection with those emotions. Otherwise, they are shallow and merely sentimental. When it comes to His cross, Jesus says sentimentality is deceptive and a merely emotional response is deficient.

We can easily be mere sentimentalists about the cross—emotions with no cost, no transformation, no crucifying effect on ourselves. Paul says, "...*by [that cross] the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world*" (Galatians 6:14). That's talking about radical transformation, not mere emotions. It's no proof that you are truly saved by the death of Jesus Christ just because you are moved emotionally when you hear about Christ's crucifixion. Tears of

mere emotion can be quickly wiped away and forgotten. Charles Spurgeon said, “The morning cloud and the early dew are fit emblems of such fleeting emotions. Such weeping is morally powerless. It has no effect upon the mind. It does not change the character. It does not cause the putting away of sin. It does not create real and saving faith in Jesus Christ.” When we survey the wondrous cross, the focal point should not be the mere physical sufferings of Christ. We should not merely try to generate an emotional reaction.

Notice how Luke as well as the other Gospel writers are restrained in the way they describe the actual crucifixion. “*And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him...*” (Luke 23:33). Now we know from medical accounts, media we’ve seen and movies we have watched that there was a whole lot of agony behind those three words—“*...they crucified him.*” But the restraint of the Biblical writers is instructive for us by telling us, “Be careful to not get swept away in emotionalism as you think about the physical sufferings of Christ. There is something deeper than a merely emotional reaction which God wants to have happen in your heart when you survey the wondrous cross.”

Paul says there is a difference between worldly grief and godly grief. “*For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death*” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Regret is when you feel bad about the consequences of your actions or are embarrassed for your reputation because you’ve done something wrong. Repentance goes deeper than that. It means you change your thinking about who you are, Who God is, how serious your sin is and how your life should be transformed as a result of what Jesus has done on the cross. That is the effect that His cross should have on our lives. Rico Tice, a pastor and author, says, “Not sentimentality but surrender.” That should be the effect of the cross—our lives surrendered to Him.

Jesus doesn’t need or desire our pity or defense. His sufferings are ended. He drank down the cup of God’s wrath to the dregs and it is empty. It is finished. He is now enthroned on high. We need to ask ourselves, “Has my response to Jesus gone any deeper than fleeting emotions? Can I honestly say I’ve surrendered my life to His Lordship? Does He own my allegiance as King?” Jesus says, “*...do not weep for me*” (Luke 23:28).

## **Do Weep**

Weep not, but weep. Jesus wants to redirect our sorrows and weeping. “*...do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children*” (Luke 23:28). “Weep for yourselves, for your children and for your nation.” Why should we weep in that way? Jesus gives a three-fold explanation in the following verses—each verse heightening the severity of the judgment that is

coming upon the world. Each verse describes a judgment so horrific that people will wish they had never been born. This is what Jesus is warning us about right before He goes to the cross. Evidently it is very serious.

- Luke 23:29. There is a day coming when barrenness will be considered blessed. This is not the way it was in Jesus' day. To be barren and not have any children was one of the worst things that could happen to you. Jesus says, "*...the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'*" There is going to come a judgment. He is probably alluding first and foremost to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. when it would have been better for people if they did not have children because of the severity of the suffering.
- Luke 23:30. Jesus says a day is coming when people will call on the mountains to fall on them to escape God's wrath. We read about that in Revelation 6:15-17:  
*<sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, <sup>16</sup> calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, <sup>17</sup> for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"*

We know Jesus is gracious—full of mercy. We love to remember that but oh, how we want to forget the wrath of the Lamb—the fact that there will be indignation and distress for every soul who does evil and does not repent. That wrath will come from the One Who died to take away the sins of the world. Jesus says we should think and weep about that. That should be a grave reality which affects us deeply.

"Weep for yourselves, for your children, for a world that is coming under judgment. Weep over sin and evil which brought about judgment. That is why I'm going to the cross."

- Luke 23:31. Jesus speaks a proverb: "*For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?*" Jesus is the green wood—the One full of sap and moisture. He is the One Who is holy. The people of Jerusalem and all sinners are the dry wood—rotten to the core. Jesus is saying, "Look at what is going to happen to Me. Even the green trees full of sap and moisture crackle like stubble in a furnace when forest fires rage. What will happen to the wood that is dry and rotten to the core? Oh, how it will burn."

If Jesus—Who knew no sin and was declared innocent over and over again—suffered like this when He became sin for us, how will we—corrupt from birth and utterly depraved—suffer when God calls us to account for our guilt and shame? Every sin must be paid for—either at the cross by the blood of Jesus or in the future judgment where God's wrath against sin will terrify those who have never found refuge in the cross. The cross of Jesus

shows us what it cost God to deliver us from the judgment we deserved for our sins. The cross of Jesus speaks eloquently and graphically of God's judgment on human sin.

I want to look at an old hymn by Joseph Hart. It's a hymn of which J.I. Packer writes, "Read it carefully, for this is the true gospel." Think about these words:

O ye sons of men be wise,  
trust no longer dreams and lies,

There are a lot of dreams, lies and sentimental emotions that will tell you, "What that pastor is saying right now is way over the top. You really don't need to take him seriously." The hymn says don't trust those dreams and lies.

Out of Christ [outside of Christ], almighty pow'r  
can do nothing but devour.

God you say is good. 'Tis true. [God is good.]  
But He's pure and holy too;  
just and jealous is His ire,  
burning with vindictive fire.

This of old Himself declared:  
Israel trembled when they heard.

Just read the Old Testament and you will see the truth of God's goodness, purity, holiness, justice and jealousy. That's the God Who is giving His Son to die in our place.

But the proof of proofs indeed [of God's holiness, justice, jealousy]  
is he sent His Son to bleed.

Do you want to know how seriously God takes sin? Look at the cross and Who hangs there—His beloved Son.

When the blessed Jesus died  
God was clearly justified:  
Sin to pardon without blood  
never in His nature stood.

"...[W]ithout the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins"  
(Hebrews 9:22).

Worship God, then, in His Son,  
there He's love and there alone.  
Think not that He will, or may,  
pardon any other way.

See the suffering Son of God,  
panting, groaning, sweating blood!  
Brethren, this had never been  
had not God detested sin.

Jesus had to die, groan and sweat blood because God detests our sin.

Be His mercy therefore sought  
in the way Himself has taught:  
There His clemency is such,  
we can never trust too much.

He that better knows than we,  
bids us all to Jesus flee.  
Humbly take him at His Word  
and your souls will bless the Lord!

(The World by Wisdom Knew Not God by Joseph Hart, 1811)

What should we learn from Jesus' words, "*...do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children*" (Luke 23:28)?

When I survey the wondrous cross,  
on which the Prince of glory died

(From When I Survey the Wondrous Cross by Isaac Watts, 1707)

I should respond to the words of this text with weeping but my tears should not be tears of sentimentality or sympathy for Jesus. My tears should be of brokenhearted contrition and repentance over the sin that brought God's judgment on Jesus and will bring God's judgment on an unrepentant world. That is why I should weep. It is the proper response to the cross.

How do we cultivate these tears? Let me give you a few short directions from this passage:

1. Think about what it cost Jesus to pray Luke 23:34 for you. Think about what it cost Him to pray for your forgiveness. May that inspire tears of repentance.
2. Consider the humiliation your sin and shame brought upon Him. "*And they cast lots to divide his garments*" (verse 34). Go back to the Garden of Eden after man sinned. What did they realize? Their nakedness—their shame. Here our Savior hangs in shame—exposed to a watching world.

In her book The Hiding Place, Corrie ten Boom tells of how they had to go through medical inspection on Fridays naked. She writes:

We had to maintain our erect hands-at-side position as we filed slowly past a phalanx of grinning guards. How there could have been any pleasure in the sight of these stick-thin legs and hunger bloated stomachs I could not imagine; nor could I see the necessity for the complete undressing. But it was one of these mornings while we were waiting—shivering in the corridor—that yet another page in the Bible leapt into life for me. He hung naked on the cross. I had not known; I had not thought. The paintings, the carved crucifixes showed at least a scrap of cloth but this I suddenly knew was the respect and

reverence of the artist. But oh, at the time itself—on that other Friday morning—there had been no reverence. No more than I saw on the faces around us now. I leaned toward Betsy—my sister ahead of me in line. Her shoulder blades stood out sharp and thin beneath her blue-mottled skin. “Betsy,” I said, “They took His clothes too.” Ahead of me, I heard a little gasp. “Oh, Corrie. And I never thanked Him.”

Consider the humiliation—the shame—our Savior went through. May it move you to thanksgiving.

3. Consider how He loved His enemies who scoffed at Him over and over again. “*He saved others; let him save himself...*” (Luke 23:35). Consider how they said to Him, “*Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!*” (verse 39). Consider the people in your life right now who scoff and scorn. They have to be dragged into church, if they come at all. They dismiss lightly any weighty truth they hear about Christ and the gospel. Think about a world that does not know what they are doing—who taunt, sneer and take the name of our Savior in vain all day long. Weep. Could Jesus have saved Himself? Absolutely? Could He have saved Himself and us? No. Look at what it cost for Him to love His enemies and may it move you to repentance.
4. Cultivate the fear of the Lord as did the thief on the cross. The dying thief rejoiced to see the fountain of blood opened for his sins. Notice what he said to the other criminal in Luke 23:40. “*Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?*” Cultivate the fear of the Lord as did that thief on the cross that day. Let it produce in you the wisdom to repent. Not sentimentality but surrender. Not fleeting emotions but radical repentance. Not fickleness but the fear of the Lord.

I want to close by reading a statement from Jerry Bridges’ book, The Joy of Fearing God:

Nothing is so well fitted to put the fear of God—which will preserve men from offending Him—into the heart as an enlightened view of the cross of Christ. There—in the cross—shines spotless holiness, inflexible justice, incomprehensible wisdom, omnipotent power, holy love. None of these excellencies darken or eclipse the other but every one of them rather gives a luster to the rest. They mingle their beings. They shine with united eternal splendor. The just Judge, the merciful Father, the wise Governor. Nowhere does justice appear so awful, mercy so amiable or wisdom so profound.

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