

***The Great Sayings in the Gospels***  
***161 - The Via Dolorosa, The Way of Sorrow***  
***Mark 15:20,21; Luke 23:27-31***

Mark 15

20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.

21 And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.

Luke 23:27-31

27 And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.

28 But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.

29 For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.

30 Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.

31 For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

**Introduction:**

Pilate having finished his examination of Jesus and being unable to persuade the Jews of His innocence, he did two contradictory things: he ‘washed his hands’ of the affair and then gave orders for Jesus to be taken and crucified. He imagined that he was making himself innocent in this matter of the death of Christ but he could not be.

Jesus was then led along the way to the location where He would be crucified. This path has been known to Christianity for a long time as the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrow, or the Path of Tears. We view with great sadness the picture in our minds of the Glorious Lord, the Savior of the World, the Son of God, being hauled through the streets of Jerusalem as a common criminal, forced to carry the cross on which He would be crucified. There is a part of us that cannot imagine anyone doing such a thing but, at the same time, those of us who have come face to face with ourselves as sinners knows quite well that except for the Grace of God upon our own souls, we would have done the same as the Jews did that day. The root of the word ‘dolorosa’ is the basis of the English word ‘doleful,’ which means sorrowful. It may also be the basis of the name Delores.

But everyone was not indifferent to His plight that day. His mother, John, and others of the women who believed on His were following as well. Then, there was a great crowd of sympathetic people and especially some women who followed weeping openly for sadness that such a great man as they knew Him to be was being taken to be executed. Were they believers? Some have speculated both ways. He was held in high regard by many in Jerusalem who had not yet believed so we cannot be certain. Some of the unbelieving might also have been terribly sad to seem Him leaving, such good He had done in their city, healing the sick and delivering the demon possessed.

There are really three stories here: the story of Simon who was compelled to carry the cross, the story of the women and the things that Jesus said to them, and then there is the story of what this is to mean to us. Do we learn anything here? Was He leaving a cryptic message for those who would read the story later? And, if so, what are we to take away from what He said?

***Let us begin with the story of Simon***

We have all been conditioned to think that Jesus fell beneath the load of the cross and, so, needed someone to help him. All of the movies that we have seen picturing the event and even some of the hymns we sing portray Jesus as struggling with the load and even falling under it. But the scriptures really do not say that. They merely state that the soldiers pressed this man into service and required him to carry the cross for Jesus. This was one of the powers that they exercised over the people when certain things were needed.

It was both customary and according to Jewish law that executions be carried out on the outside of the city walls.

Num 15:32-36

- 32 And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day.
- 33 And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation.
- 34 And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him.
- 35 And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.
- 36 And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses. KJV

Heb 13:12-13

- 12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.
- 13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. KJV

And it was the practice of the Romans to force the prisoner to carry his own cross. At the same time it was highly unusual for the Romans to both scourge a man and crucify him. Scourging was considered a close alternative to crucifixion because it often resulted in the death of the one scourged. Wounds such as those inflicted during scourging were almost certain to become infected and deadly, that is if the victim did not 'bleed out' from the during the event.

It seemed to have been in the mind of Pilate that scourging Jesus would content the Jews, that they certainly would not demand His crucifixion after this hideous beating. Surely not one would look at a man who had just suffered a Roman scourge and want him punished further...but, of course, Pilate was wrong.

It is to be remembered that Jesus had already suffered mightily before being required to carry the cross. "Consider what He had already endured within the last fifteen hours: the tense atmosphere

of the Upper Room, the betrayal by Judas, the agonies Gethsemane, the desertion by His disciples, the torture of a totally hypocritical trial before the Sanhedrin, the mockery in the palace of Caiaphas, the denial by His most prominent disciple, the trial before an unjust judge, the terrible ordeal of being scourged, and the abuse by the soldiers in the praetorium! Humanly speaking, is it not a wonder that He was able to carry the cross any distance at all?" New Testament Commentary, Mark, William Hendriksen, p.648.

I am told that the Jewish temple sat on a ridge that continued on past it and past the city wall which ran very near the temple. That ridge ended on a rounded summit whose southern face was bare rock with large holes in it. From a distance it somewhat resembled a skull, thus the name 'Golgotha' (Aram.) and 'Calvary' (Lat.). To get there, one would need to go out the eastern gate and then along the wall to the place. No doubt the path was well worn since it was apparently the preferred location of the Romans for crucifixions. Again we note how that God had sovereignly directed the course of human affairs and decisions so that there would be a place, just outside Jerusalem, when men would be executed, as it were, 'on a tree.'

But somewhere, apparently early in the journey, one of the soldiers decided that someone else should carry Jesus' cross. The question might occur to some, as it did to me as a kid, "why did Jesus need help? He walked on water, calmed a storm, raised the dead, surely he had the power to carry a cross."

The answer to that question carries a mysterious element in it. Jesus never used miraculous power exclusively for Himself. Here in the crucifixion we find only one superhuman act and that was so that His Work would be effective to all of His people. He held onto His life until the full transaction of atonement was done. Otherwise, He functioned on in the natural powers of an ordinary man. Therefore, He would not use any special powers to enable Him to carry the cross. One might also think that Jesus acted on His Own behalf in the Resurrection but I would remind you that it was the Resurrection that provided the spiritual life for all who would ever believe. Not even that was Him acting on His Own behalf.

Thus, having been beaten nearly to death and functioning in nothing but natural human power, Jesus no doubt required assistance. Since the Roman soldiers had the right to compel individuals to assist them if necessary, it fell to Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross to Golgotha.

So, who was Simon and where was Cyrene, and why does Mark mention the names of his sons? Well, Simon was a Jew who lived in what is now Ethiopia, just to the west of Egypt. There is a place there about 10 miles inland from the Mediterranean coast, a large plateau on which was located a settlement, maybe a city, named Cyrene. The man was, no doubt, a Jew and in the city of Jerusalem for the Passover and 'just happened' to be standing in the line of sight of the soldier when he decided that Jesus needed help with the cross.

Tradition has it that Simon remained and witnessed all that occurred at Jesus' crucifixion and became a believer himself. Later he would be found in Rome and a part of the church there. Mark's gospel may have been written in Rome and primarily for the Roman church with Peter as his major source of information. The 'Rufus' that Mark mentioned (with the assumption that his readers would recognize the name) was mentioned by Paul in Rom 16:13 as a part of the Roman

church.

**As an aside:** There was a number of Cyrenians in the early church.

Acts 11:19-20

19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.

20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

Acts 13:1

1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. KJV

It may even be that the Simeon, called 'Black,' mentioned in 13:1 was this same man who had carried the cross of Jesus.

We think of the thief who was suddenly saved at the crucifixion but Simon may have been as well. Again, the Sovereignty of God was displayed, bring this Cyrenian to exactly the right spot at exactly the right moment to be chosen to bear Jesus' cross and through that be saved and become a part of the early church.

**Then, and only Luke records this, as they passed along there was following them a large entourage and many of the women of that group were openly weeping.**

To them Jesus made a most cryptic set of statements.

Luke 23

28 But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.

29 For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.

30 Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.

31 For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

"Weep not for me..."

"Weep for yourselves..."

"...and for your children..."

Considering the fact that these were some of the last words that Jesus spoke during His earthly ministry and that He had a point of saying them publicly, we should notice them and pay attention. Whatever could He have meant?

Some people have surmised that He was speaking of the Judgment that was going to fall on Jerusalem in about 35 years. Some of these women, and certainly some of their children, would for sure be alive for that event.

The event, He said, would be so horrific that those who had never given birth to children would be considered blessed. They would not be forced to watch the destruction that fell upon their children. This, we note, is the opposite of the common Jewish perspective which considered children to be a blessing.

Jesus went further and said that the suffering during that time would be so horrific that people would wish for death, wishing for the mountains to fall on them and kill them suddenly rather than having to endure the extended suffering of that time.

Interestingly, there are two other times that similar language is used in the Bible.

Hos 10:7-8

7 As for Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water.

8 The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed: the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars; and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us.

Rev 6:15-17

15 And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;

16 And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:

17 For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

It is the expressed wish to die suddenly rather than face what is coming. It compares, I think, a sudden death with death from extended suffering and agony. This expression in the Hebrew idiom is expressive of the worst imaginable sort of anticipated suffering from which there is and can be no escape or relief except for annihilation.

The imagery of v.31 is most difficult and there is little help in scriptural literature. What we do know is that times when the trees were green often references times of peace and plenty, when there is enough rain and the crops are good. But Jesus is using that to reference the current moment and to compare it to a future moment when things will not be nearly so good, a time when the trees are dry.

Truly, when looked at in one way, this was a good time for Israel and Jerusalem spiritually. The Son of God had come to them, proclaimed truth in their streets, healed their sick and brought many of them to repentance and to a return to the true faith of Abraham. Yet, in this wonderful space of time they had been given and with all of the spiritual benefit poured out upon them, their Savior was being crucified. "If these things can happen when things are spiritually good, just think of what may happen when spiritual benefit has been withdrawn. What do you suppose will happen then?"

Jesus had, in fact, already told His disciples at least what things were going to be like.

Matt 24:15-22

- 15 When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)
- 16 Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains:
- 17 Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house:
- 18 Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.
- 19 And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!
- 20 But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:
- 21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.
- 22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. KJV

Luke 21:20-24

- 20 And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.
- 21 Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.
- 22 For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.
- 23 But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.
- 24 And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. KJV

Both gospel writers include the reference to the difficulty of having children during that time. And, Jesus had given His disciples special instructions as to what to do, but to these women, He only said, “weep.”

Do we suppose that this was simply a declaration of judgment upon these women who at least thought enough of Him to follow Him to Golgotha and weep for what was happening to Him? Or, do we think He was pointing them to be concerned enough to weep and pray, find repentance and then seek after the instructions He had left concerning the destruction of the city?

History records that during the siege of Jerusalem, the Roman general gave space for any who wished to leave the city to do so and it is believed that almost all if not every one of the Christians who remained left. Now, for sure it was a difficult situation for they had to take their families and leave everything else behind and they were escaping into a countryside where they could not expect to find easy food or shelter.

I wonder how many of them took Him seriously, just as I wonder how many are taking our present situation seriously. Judgment is coming for us as certainly as it was coming for them.

And just as surely as the brunt of that destruction fell on those people's children, that which is coming to our country is going to fall with its greatest weight on ours.

I feel certain that Jesus was not encouraging these women to weep in despair but to weep in prayer for themselves and their children that they might be saved, become Christians, and maybe escape the awful days ahead or at least be able to endure them.

I wonder if He would not counsel the same approach to us. Should we not weep for ourselves and for our children considering the awful days that are ahead unless He rains mercy down upon us and either revives our land or at least revives the church and reaches through us to those we love?

Are you weeping? I do not mean shedding a tear every once in a while but are you having times that the concerns both for your own spiritual condition and that of your family and the world around you become so intense that you simply break down.

Is there anything to weep about?

I feel like the word from many places is that of the song that was popular a few years ago, "Don't worry, be happy!"

But is there cause for concern, for prayer, for tears?

1. Do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength? Be honest now. Does this issue cause you any concern? Should it? If it is not, why not?
2. Do you love your neighbor as yourself? That is half of the whole Law of God. Are you concerned about their souls? Do you pray for them? Do you drive the streets of our community and wonder what is going on behind those doors? Do you weep for those who do not know Christ?
3. Have you taken up your cross and followed Christ? You cannot be His disciple unless you do, you know. What is your level of concern about that?
4. Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? If not, are you seeking to be? Are there any tears involved?
5. Is your life an example for others? If not, how deeply do you care about that?
6. Are there lost ones in your life who are certain to perish unless they repent? When was the last time you wept over them before the Lord?
7. Is your country doing well or is it about to collapse because it has forsaken God and His Son? What are your feelings on this? Have you lifted up your voice and wept before God lately concerning your country?

There are many such questions that I could ask and I ask them of myself continually.

Tears can mean a lot of things... sadness, sympathy, emotionalism.. And they can be faked. But weeping is a manifestation of deep and profound concern. And it should never be done to impress others. ***But it should be done, one cannot help but do it if he/she really cares.***

I know that there are a lot of people who worry that we might become morbid and depressed but I really do not think that this is the danger. The danger lies more, I think, in people who call themselves Christian thinking that they are “rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing.” This was the attitude of the Laodicean church in Rev. 3 and that church/preacher was threatened with being cast away by the Lord. He said that they made Him sick. I doubt there was much weeping going on there over spiritual concerns.

Our danger is that we are busy rearranging the deck chairs on a sinking ship, and it is really difficult to watch. But our children are not going to get a backdoor pass into heaven because we were officially categorized as ‘Christian.’

Weeping occurs when the sadness of a situation overwhelms our sense of self-control and seizes upon us with such power that we lose our composure. And reason tells us that the situation is out of control unless God Himself comes to our aid in power.

One might flip the coin over and ask this, “what kind of people do not weep in the face of intense sadness?”

The ones who do not believe it....

The ones who do not care....

The ones who are simply indifferent...

So, I ask you, do you believe:

that your country is collapsing?

That your lost ones are perishing?

That you are less faithful that you should be?

Shall we commit ourselves to prayer and seek to care enough that we might weep?