



A TIME FOR TEARS

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It was nearing the Passover, and Jesus was ready to make His triumphal entry, as we call it, into the city of Jerusalem. At the summit of the Mount of Olives, a crowd had gathered as Jesus made His approach to Jerusalem on this particular Sunday on the back of a donkey. They welcomed and they hailed Him as the promised King, but a very different reception was awaiting Him inside the gates of the city. This would be the last mile of Jesus' earthly life before His crucifixion. This was the final week and He knew what awaited Him at Jerusalem. Luke's gospel sets the scene.

Luke 19:41 "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it."

Jesus could very well have wept over Himself and over His circumstances. He could've thought about His friends and disciples who would soon betray and desert Him, and wept over that. He could've thought about the unfair treatment He would soon receive, and had plenty of reason to weep. The horrors of the scourging and the crucifixion He would endure frightened Him as a man, and the thought of His heavenly Father leaving Him and turning His face away must've been weighing very heavily upon the mind of our Savior. But those weren't the reasons that Jesus wept that day. Jesus looked out over Jerusalem and the Bible says that He "*wept over it.*"

The New Testament tells us about three occasions on which Jesus wept. We're told about the day that Jesus wept tears of sympathy over the death of His dear friend, Lazarus. When word came to Him that Lazarus was sick and had died in the city of Bethany, Jesus went there to be with Mary and Martha, Lazarus' family, and we're told simply that, "*Jesus wept*" (**John 11:35**). Now, Jesus knew that Lazarus would be all right. He went there to raise him from the dead. But when He saw their hearts filled with grief and bewilderment, he shed quiet tears of sympathy.

Then, we read about Jesus shedding tears of agony on the eve of His death. He went deep in the garden of Gethsemane and He wept tears of dread and sorrow. Luke vividly describes Jesus' private moments, knowing what was ahead of Him.

Luke 22:44 “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly...”

The gospel writers don't tell us that Jesus wept, but the writer of Hebrews does.

Hebrews 5:7 “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared...”

Those were hot and bitter tears, as Jesus shuddered to think of Calvary and the helplessness and abandonment that He would feel on the cross.

But there's another time that Jesus wept. It should've been a great time for joy and triumph, but rather, it was a time for tears. The Lord was approaching the city of Jerusalem for His last week, the week of the cross, the week of His passion. Many miles, many miracles, many sermons, many memories were now behind Him, and with a great sense of determination, yet trepidation, Jesus sets His face toward Jerusalem and He prepares to make His royal entry into the holy city. We usually refer to it as His “triumphal entry.” Whereas a returning King would enter the city on the back of a warhorse in victory or celebration, Jesus, the prince of peace, enters on the back of a donkey. Kings and Generals might ride down a pathway strewn with flowers and ride beneath a golden banner, but there were no such things adorning the procession of Jesus on this day. A crowd of common people had gathered around Him. Many of them spread out their garments on the ground. Some broke off the branches of palm trees and laid out a path for the coming King to enter Jerusalem. That, consequently, made the Pharisees so mad that they could hardly stand it, and they told Jesus' disciples to rebuke the crowd and make them stop (**Luke 19:39**). The people were crying out in celebration, praise and adulation as Jesus began this descent down the western slope of Olivet. Now, that would've provided a magnificent view. It was a wonderful panorama from that point of the beautiful city of Jerusalem and its temple. In fact, J.W. McGarvey and Philip Pendleton tell us that the summit of Olivet was about 200 feet in elevation above the nearest wall of Jerusalem and about 100 feet above the highest point in the city. So, Jesus could look down at all of Jerusalem like an open book. It must've been a stunning view! Then suddenly, the Bible tells us this:

Luke 19:41 “And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it.”

Scholars tell us that the verb “*wept*” here doesn't mean that tears merely filled the eyes of Jesus and ran down His cheeks, like at the death of Lazarus. No. Rather, it means that *He broke down and He sobbed*. These were uncontrollable tears and convulsive sobs. Why? Jesus looks down and sees the city in a bright array. There was an air of excitement in the streets, as it was a time for Passover. Pilgrims from all over had come and filled the city. And there's the temple, shining in the sun, the pride of Israel! It was breathtakingly beautiful, but Jesus weeps over it. When He looks down at the city and sees the houses, He sees them flattened and burned. When He sees that temple standing tall and glittering bright, He sees a heap of smoldering ruins. When He sees the people walking down the streets in Jerusalem, He actually sees the walking dead. He sees corpses brutally slaughtered. And when He looks down at the cobblestone pathways of that city that day, He actually sees rivers of blood, because He was looking into the future. He saw what the others did not, and could not see at the time, and He was so overcome that He burst into tears. I want to suggest some reasons why Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and consequently why Jesus must weep over many of us today.

First of all, I believe that Jesus wept over the spiritual condition of Jerusalem. When the Lord looked down at the city, He would've seen Mt. Moriah and Herod's Temple. It was an architectural wonder. In fact, scholars wonder today how people of that time would've built such a thing. This was the second temple that was built, about 500 years before Jesus was born. The first temple was built by Solomon, and it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. After some years in exile, some of the people were allowed to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, but it paled in comparison to the first temple. But, shortly before the first century and the birth of our Savior, Herod set out to rebuild and renovate the temple. He wanted it to rival all of the temples of the ancient world. He spent a vast fortune and several decades dismantling and rebuilding it, and it was something to behold. The temple mount was built up and smoothed and massive walls surrounding the temple were built. The walls alone were huge, standing several stories high. The temple grounds would've covered the equivalent of several football fields, or about 35 acres. The temple building itself was made of massive and precious stones and was supported by columns or pillars, each of which was made of a single stone of polished marble, according to Josephus. It was, without a doubt, a breathtaking sight, as Jesus stands up on the slope of Olivet and sees it. But, He doesn't see a beautiful house of worship. He sees a den of thieves. He would march into the courts of that temple the very next day, with eyes flaming with righteous indignation and He would cast those religious leaders out of that place for turning God's house of prayer into a house of merchandise and corruption. The temple, the place where He, the promised Messiah, should've been most immediately recognized and worshipped, would instead be the seed of skepticism and the place where He would meet some of His fiercest opposition and rejection. It broke the heart of Jesus to see the temple of His father become such a place of corruption and false religion.

I would imagine that it grieves the Savior today, as He looks down from heaven and sees what ignorant and carnal men have done to His church: commercializing it, prostituting it, dividing it, perverting it. Make no mistake, we live in a day of counterfeit Christianity. We live in a day much like the Jews of old, where men have a form of godliness but they deny the power thereof, as Paul said would be the case (**II Timothy 3:5**). Men have ignored Christ's purpose, His plan, His mission for the church. They've turned it into something completely foreign to the pattern and teaching of the New Testament.

You know, Josephus tells us that there would've been as many as three million Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem for the Passover. But Jesus didn't see millions of people there repenting of their sins and seeking God. He saw people caught up in the superficial show of dead and meaningless and ineffectual religion. I mean, look at this very scene surrounding Jesus:

Luke 19:37-38 "And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest."

Do you realize this same crowd, who is here crying out, "Hail Him," just five days later will be yelling, "Crucify Him!"? Jesus could see their hearts and He knew the hypocrisy and fickleness. He knew the ignorance and self-righteousness and the hard-heartedness that filled that city, and He couldn't help but weep.

I believe there's another reason that Jesus wept over that city. He saw their fleeting opportunity. Time was running out.

Luke 19:41-42 “And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it. Saying, if thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”

What does He mean by that? He means that this should've been a jubilant time, because their King whom they had waited for hundreds and hundreds of years was now here! Their Messiah was standing here in their presence; the promised seed of Abraham was right before their eyes! If ever they should've believed and turned to God in repentance, it was now! They should've known all along, but especially NOW! After all, they had seen the miracles and acknowledged the great and mighty works that were done. They had seen the prophecy fulfilled. Here they were, headed into Jerusalem to observe the Passover like they had done for centuries, and who was the Passover all about? Jesus. He WAS their Passover, but they didn't know it. This would be the golden opportunity of their lives, and they were absolutely blind to it. Jesus came to bring them peace with God, but instead, His peace would be met with their violence. His salvation would be met with their skepticism. Yes, they had been looking for Him for hundreds of years, and now were missing Him as He stood right before them. And now, it was a matter of days until they would commit the ultimate sin and crucify Him. If there was ever a time for them to repent, it was in these few days before they crucified Jesus, but their time of opportunity was almost up. The Jews, who should've been the first to receive Him, as a nation flatly rejected Him, and punishment awaited.

You know, God always gives a season of opportunity before He pours out His judgment. Always. Even when men are at their worst, God holds back His wrath and gives room for repentance. But God's patience has a limit. Six hundred years before this incident, there was a weeping prophet just like the Lord Jesus, who came begging for God's people to repent because the moments were precious; the sands of time were quickly slipping through the hourglass of God's patience. Jeremiah wasn't a 'positive preacher.' He preached to the people of Judah and warned them time and time again to repent or judgment would come. They wouldn't listen to weeping Jeremiah, just like they didn't listen to our weeping Savior. Finally, just as Jeremiah had warned, here came the Babylonians, who laid siege to Jerusalem and trapped the Jews inside. They literally sealed off the city and you know what happened? They starved. And with tears dripping from his cheeks, Jeremiah lamented over them and his words are haunting.

Jeremiah 8:20 “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.”

What was he talking about? He literally meant that the city was surrounded by fields of ripened grain. There was plenty to eat, there was grain all around them, but they were starving. Their opportunity of harvest was gone. You see, the Babylonians had encircled the city and the Jews couldn't get to the fields to harvest the grain. Starvation had set in, times became desperate. We're told that mothers even cooked and ate their own children! God's wrath and judgment was being poured out!

God had looked down in the days of Noah and said the following:

Genesis 6:3 “My spirit shall not always strive with man...”

That's a warning to us today, as well.

Isaiah 55:6 “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.”

In other words, the harvest of life itself is passing away and we are not saved. You know, God opens a door of mercy before He closes it in judgment forever. We have enjoyed religious freedom in our part of the world for a long time. We ought to be ashamed. We have Bibles in abundance. We've had enough preaching to save the entire world a thousand times over, but what have we done with that opportunity? We've rejected the truth, gotten drunk on pleasure and pride. We've exchanged redemption for riches, and time is running out. Jesus now, six hundred years after Jeremiah, looks at that same city that would now, ultimately and finally reject Him to the point where they would murder Him, and He, like Jeremiah, weeps over it. He knows that time is running out. In what way was time running out?

Luke 19:43-44 "For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

Now, when Jesus said that, He was actually looking about forty years in the future, when one of the worst blood baths in human history would take place. Near the end of the Jewish war, the Roman Army, led by Titus, would surround the city and siege it and leave it in ruins. The secular Jewish historian, Josephus, paints the most chilling picture of what happened then. These people on the slope of Olivet who were leaping and dancing about Jesus on this day and shouting, "Hosanna, Hosanna," Jesus knew that in just a little while, one million of them would be slaughtered by the Romans. They crucified Jews, we're told, until they ran out of trees to crucify them upon! The blood ran down the streets like a river! That tall, beautiful, pristine temple that Jesus saw would be burned and toppled until not one stone was left upon another. That vista of beautiful Jerusalem with its lush gardens and trees would be turned into a desert when the Romans were finished with it. In a matter of a few months after Titus invaded it, that splendid city would be nothing more than smoldering ruins. Jesus would refer to it, as would Daniel, as "*the abomination of desolation*" (**Matthew 24:15, Mark 13:14, Daniel 9**). Jerusalem destroyed and the nation of Israel wiped away.

But did you know that not one single Christian died in the destruction of Jerusalem? They escaped. But 1.1 million Jews, who in that golden hour of opportunity rejected the Christ, died. Jesus wept over what was about to happen. It was a time for tears.

Mark it down. This world has a date with destruction. It's not going to just keep going on and on and on forever. One day, it's going to be judgment day. One day, the last grain of sand is going to sink through the hourglass of time and the world is going to meet the wrath of God. Now, Jesus doesn't delight in that. He weeps over that. He weeps over your lost and undone condition today because He has given you a golden opportunity and you, perhaps, are wasting it. Judgment is coming.

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