

The lamentation of the cross (Luke 23:27-43)

Today, we will study Luke 23:27-43. The title of the message is "The Lamentation of the Cross."

1. Weep for yourself

27

²⁷ A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him.

What did these people and women really think of Jesus? Did these women literally grieve for him and pity him?

Let's look at v. 48-49.

48-49

⁴⁸ When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. ⁴⁹ But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

This is the scene right after Jesus died on the cross. It doesn't say "all those who knew Jesus, including the women who had followed him from Galilee wailed and mourned for him". They were watching what was happening.

Did you notice Luke divides the women into two groups? One group is women who mourned and wailed and the other group is women who were watching them. The first group is among the crowd, the people who demanded that Jesus should be crucified, and the people stood watching Jesus being crucified. And the other group is among those who followed Jesus.

So it is appropriate to think the first group of women weren't really mourning and grieving for Jesus' death, but they were professional wailing women, or women who pretended to be like them.

Wailing women, professional mourners or paid mourners are the women who attend the funeral and create the atmosphere of sadness by wailing as their

job.¹

While Jesus was going to the cross, they acted as if he was already crucified and dead, and his funeral had already started. They were making fun of Jesus. It was as if they were saying to him, "You are going to die. You are as good as dead. You can't escape now. It's finished."

27-31

²⁷ A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. ²⁸ Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' ³⁰ Then " 'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" ' ³¹ For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Jesus told them that it was for them and their children that they should really weep and grieve. And that was connected with the last judgment.

Here "the green tree" and "the dry tree" illustrate "the judgment". The green tree, live plant or green grass cannot be burned easily. But if you get the hang, you can even burn them. The dry grass, dry tree or dead tree, on the other hand, can be quickly burned up in fire.

Who does the green tree symbolize? And who does the dry tree symbolize? There may be some possibilities. If you look at commentaries, they will give you some conceivable opinions. However you understand this, which one is who, the point is this. Whether it is the green tree or the dry tree, once it is thrown into the fire, it will be burned. It cannot come out from the fire by itself. A man cannot escape, once he is thrown into the fire of God's judgment. (cf. Luke 3:7-9, John 15:6)

Those women followed Jesus. But it was to mock him and ridicule him. They show grief over someone else to be judged, punished and lose life. But they are totally ignorant and defenseless against the judgment that is about to happen to them. The day of judgment is coming near. No one can escape that. If

¹ Wailing women appears in Jeremiah 9:17. And in the New Testament, when the daughter of Jairus, the synagogue ruler died, when Jesus came to his house, there were some people crying and wailing loudly with funeral flute players. They are probably wailing women, professional mourners. (Matt 9:23, Mark 5:38)

they stay the way they are, they will definitely end up in eternal destruction. But they are totally unaware of it, and have no preparation for that. They should rather grieve for themselves.

2. They do not know what they are doing

32-38

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. ³³ When they came to the place called the Skull, there they crucified him, along with the criminals--one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. ³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One." ³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." ³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: This is the King of the Jews.

This is the very scene of Jesus' crucifixion. When he was crucified, two criminals were also crucified. The soldiers crucified Jesus and divided up his clothes by casting lots. The people stood watching him.

The rulers sneered at Jesus, "If you are the Christ of God, the Chosen One, save yourself!" The soldiers also mocked him, "King of the Jews, save yourself!"

They call Jesus "the Christ of God" "The king of the Jews". But that was just by words. They didn't really believe so. They called Jesus so, in order to insult him and mock him.

Calling Jesus God, Christ and King can become the greatest insult to him.

The question is not how you call Jesus, but what kind of relationship you have with him.

Matt 7:21-23

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to

me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

That relationship is not built by what you have done, even using his name. But the relationship is built how you have welcomed Jesus in your daily life. Do people see Jesus is our God through our lives? Do our thoughts reflect Jesus as our Christ, Savior and God? Does my choice show that Jesus is my Lord?

In Luke 23, the rulers and the soldiers call Jesus "The Christ of God, the King of the Jews." But they are just words. They don't really think Jesus is Christ, King and God.

The interesting point is this. They are fulfilling the prophecies about the suffering Messiah over Jesus by their own hand. But they cannot recognize Jesus as Christ. Let's see them one by one.

Is 53:12

¹² ...he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors...

When Jesus was crucified, was he alone? Was there anyone else? V. 32, there were criminals. Not just one, two of them.

Ps 22:18

¹⁸ They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

What did they do after they crucified Jesus? V. 34, they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Ps 22:17

¹⁷ I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.

When Jesus was crucified, he was surrounded by the crowd. What were they doing? V. 35, they stood watching him.

Ps 22:7

⁷ All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:

What did the rulers say to Jesus on the cross? V. 35, they sneered at Jesus. What did the soldiers say to him? V. 36, they mocked him.

Ps 69:21

²¹ They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.

What did the soldiers do when they came up to Jesus? V. 36, they offered him wine vinegar.

Is 9:7

⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever...

There was a written notice above him, when he was crucified. What was written there? V. 38, the King of the Jews.

We have seen six incidents. Each one of them are fulfilling the prophecies about the suffering Messiah over Jesus.

Did Jesus hypnotize them to act in a way that fulfilled the prophecies? I don't think so. They were doing as they liked. Then, did the disciples who wrote the gospels make up these stories to match the prophecies, so that people would believe Jesus is Christ? That is impossible. Many people witnessed this scene, if there are any lies in the records, they will be easily discovered.

That is, it is not Jesus' own invention, nor his disciples that Jesus is the Christ God promised through the Bible. It is because Jesus is the Christ that these incidents happened over him.

The rulers and the soldiers called Jesus "The Christ of God, the King of the Jews." They are fulfilling the prophecies about the suffering Messiah over Jesus by their own hand. But they cannot recognize Jesus as Christ. And they say to him "Save yourself."

It is not Jesus who needs salvation, but they need salvation. They

cannot understand that they are the very ones who need salvation. Here is the lamentation of the cross. Jesus prayed for them, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

3. Today you will be with me in paradise

39-43

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence?" ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³ Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Two criminals were crucified with Jesus. The rulers and the soldiers said, "Save yourself" to insult Jesus. One of the crucified criminals also cursed Jesus and said, "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!"

When he said "Save yourself" "Save us", he meant "Come down from the cross" "Let us escape from the crucifixion". So he is not talking about the eternal Salvation. (cf. Mark 15:30)

When we look at the gospel of Matthew and Mark, we can see that in the beginning both of those criminals were cursing, hurling insults at Jesus. (Matt 27:44, Mark 15:32)

However, something happened in the heart of one of them. He rebuked the other one and said: "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." (40-41).

He says: We are criminals who deserve crucifixion. Can we speak ill of others? Who can be worse than us? Crucifixion, death penalty is what our deeds deserve. We are not in the position where we can plead for release.

But Jesus didn't do anything wrong. We are criminals who deserve crucifixion. We are not qualified to blame him nor complain to him, saying, "Why don't you save us?" No way should we insult him. For we are the ones on the

cross who can't even move our hands and feet freely, let alone come down from the cross, just waiting for death in this suffering. We deserve just for that.

And he said "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."
(42)

He started to have this assurance: Jesus will surely be enthroned in the kingdom. "When you are enthroned in your kingdom, please remember me, please keep me somewhere in your mind. Please don't say you don't know me."

Jesus taught through a parable the relation between being known by the Lord and being welcomed by Him.

Luke 13:25-27

²⁵ Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' ²⁶ "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷ "But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'

We cannot enter the kingdom without being known by Jesus and being in relationship with Him. To put it in extreme terms, that is all that matter in the kingdom. It's all about the relationship.

Jesus said to him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." (43) He didn't say, "You will surely enter the paradise." But he said, "Today you will be with me in paradise."

Actually, this word of Jesus is quite complicated to understand if we look at the details. Now, let's try to understand it as simple as possible in the context of the whole Bible.

The message is this. "You will not just be remembered by me, but you will be with me in the perfect condition." The kingdom of God has already been there. And it is coming. This man was welcomed by Jesus into paradise, heaven, the kingdom of heaven, His kingdom.² And he would be with Jesus forever.

² Paradise: Originally a Persian word meaning "park" or "garden." The Greek OT and some Jewish writers referred to the Garden of Eden as "paradise." By NT times it came to mean the abode of the righteous after death, thus heaven. "Children's Ministry Resource Book," Nelson, 1993, p.1328

He hasn't received water baptism. He has never taken part in communion. He has never given tithe at a church. He had no time to do any act of righteousness. He had no time to grow as his disciple, bearing the fruit of the Spirit. He had no experience of fellowshiping with other believers. He had very limited understanding of Jesus, almost zero knowledge about Jesus. Literally, he was saved only by grace through faith.

In that sense, we are all the same. We are saved only by grace through faith. (Eph 2:8) Grace is the undeserved favor from God we humans cannot earn ourselves.

How will Jesus feel, if there is a person like this? He is in the kingdom by the redeeming grace of Jesus, but he makes an effort to enter it as if he hadn't entered yet. "I have been doing bad things, so I am receiving its retributions. Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." "Don't you remember your sins are forgiven? You have been welcomed in the kingdom? You are with me?" "What a merciful, comforting word! I will try my best to enter the kingdom by all means! First, I will stop doing this. Then I will stop doing that. Then I will do this and that. And when it gets better, I will also do this and that. Then, surely Jesus will let me enter his kingdom." How does this look in Jesus' eyes? Will He be glad about this way of life?

In Luke 15, there is a parable of the prodigal son. He received his share of the estate from his father, and he squandered all. He had spent everything, now he began to be in need. He didn't even have enough food to eat. He thought if he could stay with his father even as one of his hired men, he would not starve to death. So, he went back to his father. His father welcomed him as his son, not as a hired man.

And, what if he always flatters his father, or he looks nervous and timid in front of his father, as if the father was a cold-blooded dictator? What if he only speaks about what is going well in his work, and blame others for failures and make excuses as if he was in front of a strict sales manager who is only interested in his work? The father welcomed the son who came back to him as his son. But, he is not there with his father as his son. Once he left the father, now he's come back but he is still a lost son in his father's house. For the father, there is no greater sadness than this.

Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Galatians like this.

Gal 3:1-3

¹ You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. ² I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? ³ Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

2000 years after that, Performance Trap is still one of the most common errors Christians can fall into. “If I can become a success I picture in my mind, and live as an ideal Christian, then God will accept me, listen to my prayer, love me, protect me and bless me.” If we think like that, and strive to live like that, we are in the performance trap. You are the son or daughter who is still lost in the Father's house.

And there may also be a case like this. Although I come back to the Father already, I still have dark side in my life. I still have broken parts in me. And, the point is here, I pretend I am ok before God. This is the lamentation of the cross.

When we talk about “dark side”, it doesn't just refer to committing crimes.

1 Cor 3:3 (NKJ)

³ for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?

“Envy” and “strife” don't fit for the kingdom of God. For the gospel of the cross is the restoration of our fellowship with God, and our fellowship with others. (cf. Rom 5:10-11, 1 Cor 12:12-14) Through our relationship with God and with others, the light of the truth shows that we still hold envy, strife, hatred, anger, pride and bitterness in our hearts. It usually has a deep root in our minds. It is often caused by painful experiences. Broken parts in us need to be healed and restored. We have a good news. We know our Savior. We need the Savior. We need His work of healing, restoration, transformation, sanctification.

Two criminals were crucified with Jesus. They both saw the same cross, the same Jesus, listened to the same words. One came to know Jesus but the other didn't come to know him, saying "Get down from the cross and save me."

By the cross, the redemption was completed. The kingdom of God is there. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and he is there. He is inviting us to be with him in the kingdom. Some come to know Jesus, and start to live as God's people. But others don't come to know him. They just keep crying out "Save me!"

By the cross, the reconciliation was completed. The way of restoration of the fellowship with God was opened. Some people come to know Jesus, experience the reconciliation with God and people, restore their relationships, and the relationships are deepened. But other people don't come to Jesus, still hold envy, strife, hatred, anger, pride and bitterness in their hearts. They just keep crying out "Where is God?" "Where is my savior?" "Save me!"

Here is the lamentation of the cross.

Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. (Jh 20:21-22)

For what? "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." (2 Cor 5:18)

This is God's promise. "For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants." (Is 44:3)

"The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing." (Is 51:3)