# Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion April 14, 2019

***REMEMBER ME!***

**(LUKE 23:26-43)**

26 As they led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. 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?"

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.

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."

**Introduction**: I am sure that most of you have heard of the law of cause and effect. In essence, this law or principle affirms that there is an adequate cause or motivation for every action that takes place. For example, let’s suppose you are holding a paper in your hand and let it go. The paper will fall to the floor, table top, or whatever surface is near, because you caused it to do so by letting go of it. Another example is this: Suppose you are at a basketball game and you let out a loud cheer. Why? Because the team you are rooting for made a basket.

The law of cause and effect plays an important in today’s Gospel reading, because there are numerous causes or reasons for why people do what they do. Let’s examine these people and reasons, and then consider how it relates to us in our own daily lives.

**I. Reasons to Weep (23:26-31)**

23:26 – **“Cyrene”** is a country in northern Africa which had a large Jewish population.

Those who were to be crucified were forced to **“carry”** their own crosses, but Jesus was too weak to do so. The **“cross”** weighed about thirty to forty pounds and was typically strapped across the victim’s shoulder.

23:28 – In spite of all His pain, suffering, and humiliation, Jesus tells sympathetic women, **“daughters of Jerusalem,”** to **“weep”** for themselves and their **“children”** rather than for Him. This reveals His great compassion.

23:29-30 – These verses point to the destruction of Jerusalem that would take place in A.D. 70. This event is briefly described earlier in Luke 19:43-44:

The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.

Also, Luke 21:23 mentions “how dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers.” This prediction refers to the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 66 led by the Roman general Titus and its eventual destruction in A.D. 70. For an account of this tragic and gruesome event you may wish to read *Jewish War* by Josephus, a Jewish historian.

23:29 – The positive reference to **“barren women”** points to seriously tragic times, since children are viewed as wonderful gifts from God (Psalm 127:3).

23:30 – These two commands to **“fall on us”** and **“cover us”** are actually plans for a quick death due to intense suffering. This verse is a partial quotation of Hosea 10:8 in which Israel is being judged for the sin of idolatry.

23:31 – **“For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”** is more literally translated as, “Because if they do these things to the green tree, what will happen to the withered one?” The green tree is the healthy one, while the withered one is not.

**QUESTION**: What do green and dry trees in 23:31 have to do with the immediate context? Obviously, this verse is to be taken figuratively, but in what way?

**ANSWER**: The immediate context in 23:28-30 deals with the tragic destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The green (healthy) tree refers to Jesus, since “these things” are being done to Him now. The dry, withered tree, then, refers to the unbelieving Jews whose nation will be destroyed in A.D. 70. In light of the context the “men” (literally “they”) here do not refer to the Romans but the Jews. Jesus is using a lesser-to-greater argument of one disaster which happens only to Him, but a much worse disaster which involves the deaths of many.

**** Even when His followers are weeping over His cruel death, Jesus is warning the people of the certainty of divine judgment. (The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was a preview, or type, of eternal separation from God in the afterlife. Unfortunately, so few people take this for granted as was done in Europe during the 1930’s:

Winston Churchill, his wary eye fixed on Hitler, was a lone voice in the years preceding World War II. He continually warned his nation and the world of the impending disasters about to befall Europe, but few listened. In 1936, he embarked on a strenuous campaign to awaken England with his cries of alarm. In one article, published in the most prominent newspapers of fourteen countries, he warned that the peoples of Europe were *chattering, busy, sporting, toiling, amused from day to day by headlines and from night to night by cinemas, slipping, sinking, rolling backward to the age when the earth was void and darkness moved upon the face of the waters.*

Surely, he argued, *it is worth a supreme effort … to control the hideous drift of events and arrest calamity on the threshold. Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!!! NOW is the appointed time.*

But few listened. [Taken from *Nelson’s Complete Book of Stories*, p. 507]

**II. Reasons to Forgive (23:32-34)**

23:33 – The Aramaic name for **“skull”** is Golgotha, while the Latin word is Calvary. This **“place”** was located outside the city wall, since this was the custom for crucifixion.

To be **“crucified”** involves heavy iron nails through both wrists and through the arches of each foot (the left pressed back on the right with the knees partially bent). The pain intensely goes to the wrists and then to the feet as the victim tries to alleviate the pain by alternately sagging and straightening himself. The muscles will eventually cramp severely in this awkward position to the point where the victim cannot straighten himself out, limiting his breathing (unable to exhale). This may well be the cruelest form of punishment and execution devised by mankind! Depending upon the physical condition of the victim, it could take several hours or even days before death came.

23:34 – Jesus’ great love is revealed by His prayer that God the Father would **“forgive”** others. Certainly, the Jewish leaders, Roman authorities and soldiers, and crowd knew **“what they were doing”** – that they were approving of Jesus’ crucifixion. However, they did not understand the spiritual significance of this event.

The **“clothes”** which the soldiers **“divided up”** probably included sandals, an under and outer garment, a belt, and possibly even a head covering. This along with the phrase **“casting lots”** calls to mind Psalm 22:18. As tragic as it seems, this was a fulfillment of divine prophecy.

**III. Reasons to Mock (23:35-39)**

23:35 – **“Sneered”** (*ekmuktērizō*) literally refers to “holding up the nose in derision” of someone. This verb is more accurately translated as “were sneering,” since it is in the Greek imperfect tense which indicates continual action in the past. This is cruel sarcasm with intense mockery of Jesus.

**“He saved others”** refers to Jesus’ miracles, and **“if He is the Christ of God”** mocks Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah.

23:36 – **“Wine vinegar”** refers to cheap sour wine that was drunk by **“soldiers.”** This was not effective in dulling Jesus’ pain but was a fine thirst quencher. This was not done out of compassion, but rather was an attempt at having fun sadistically. These soldiers were seeking to entertain themselves at Jesus’ expense.

23:37 – What a joke to the Romans that a beaten, publicly humiliated, crucified Jew could actually be **“a king”**!

23:38 – The sign on Jesus’ cross which said **“This is the King of the Jews”** was designed to mock Jesus’ claim to being the Messianic King.

23:39 – **“Criminals”** (*kakourgos*) is literally “evil worker.” In Matthew 27:38 they are described as “robbers” (*lēstēs*) which is better translated as “insurrectionists” (those who were dedicated to the violent overthrow of Roman rule), since robbery was not a capital crime.

**“Hurled insults”** (*blasphēmeō*) here refers to highly offensive slander, and this verb is in the Greek imperfect tense which indicates continual action in the past. This was not just a mere outburst of frustration, but repeated blasphemies were uttered!

**** Notice the progression of thought here: People are simply staring at Jesus as if He were some kind of bizarre spectacle, religious leaders are cruelly sneering at Him with biting sarcastic remarks, sadistic Roman soldiers are viciously poking fun at Him, and even a condemned criminal is hurling insults upon Him. The highest to the lowest in society were mocking Jesus, the King of kings! It wasn’t so much the nails that kept Him on the cross; it was His love for us, as Romans 5:8 brings out: “God demonstrates His own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

**IV. Reasons to Rebuke (23:40-41)**

23:40-41 – Matthew 27:44 and Mark 15:32 record that both **“criminals”** had **“hurled insults”** at Jesus. Only Luke records this man’s repentance.

**** What a miracle! A convict, probably an insurrectionist and murderer, is standing up for Jesus and is rebuking his fellow criminal who was mocking Jesus. This illustrates the power of the crucified Christ, the perfect Son of God, to change even the hardest of human hearts.

A man had seen the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, and was so touched by it that he confessed to a crime that he had covered up so well that he got away with it. Apparently he had killed someone and had made it look like a suicide. In one sense this man was crazy to confess, since he will undoubtedly spend much of his life, if not the rest of it, in prison for premeditated murder. However, the power of the cross is such that it brings conviction of sin, gives a heart of faith and repentance, and graciously offers the promise of eternal forgiveness.

**V. Reasons for Paradise (23:42-43)**

23:43 – **“Paradise** (*paradeisos*) comes from a Persian word which means “garden.” It is used in reference to the Garden of Eden as a symbol for a time of future blessing (Isaiah 51:3; Ezekiel 31:8), and in later Judaism it referred to the place of blessing for the righteous in the afterlife.

Religious leaders, soldiers, and even condemned criminals mock Jesus to save Himself (23:35, 37, 39), and remarkably He promises to save a repentant, condemned criminal. In spite of mankind’s sin and spiritual blindness, Jesus was truly focused on their spiritual salvation. How can He forgive people of such terrible sins? Note the following illustration:

There is a story that one night Martin Luther went to sleep troubled about his sin. In a dream he saw an angel standing by a blackboard, and at the top of the board was Luther’s name. The angel, chalk in hand, was listing all of Luther’s sins, and the list filled the blackboard. Luther shuddered in despair, feeling that his sins were so many that he could never be forgiven. But suddenly in his dream he saw a pierced hand writing above the list these words: “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” As Luther gazed in amazement, the blood flowed from the wounded hand and washed the record clean. [*Nelson’s Complete Book*, pp. 363-364]

Forgiven by the shed blood of the Son of God,

Pastor Steve Waterman