

Daughters of Jerusalem

(part of the Way of the Cross Lenten Series – Churches Together in Swaffham)

Luke 23: 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. (NIV)

We've been considering that journey that Jesus made from the court of Pontius Pilate out of Jerusalem to be crucified at Golgotha. We have considered the sufferings that he experienced – the beatings, the scourging and then being made to drag His cross through the streets. I hope what we discussed in this part of our course is the way in which Jesus was prepared to suffer for us. His mind was on His task in obedience to the Father and His passion for redeeming us.

We have recalled in the second in our series people that were looking on at this terrible scene. We have thought of those that had followed Him from Galilee, particularly His own mother Mary. For her it was a grief-stricken time. It must have been awful because she was witnessing the execution of her son on false charges and as far as she could see this was the end. It is a terrible thing for a parent to lose a child, whatever age they are.. For the disciples and those who had faithfully followed the three years, it was devastating. Most of them fled in Gethsemane

But we should have seen quite a different experience as Simon of Cyrene gets dragged out of the crowd. There he was, another Jewish person of the *diaspora* coming for his passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem. We don't know what knowledge of Jesus he had before this day, but this encounter with Jesus was life-changing and three out of the four evangelists mention him and Mark mentions his sons Alexander and Rufus.

This week we consider the next part of Jesus' journey where he turns to women who are wailing as they followed Him. By the way Jesus addresses them, they are citizens of Jerusalem. We don't know what their commitment to Jesus was. Possibly they admired Him as many in Jerusalem did. And they mourned as they pitied Him.

This kind of open public mourning – the wailing – is common still in many Middle East societies. The more tragic the death, the worse the wailing. And what Jesus does is turns and addresses them. He says three things to them – and He wasn't even a Baptist!

- He admonishes them. Admonition is the gentle caution – a milder version of a rebuke.

"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?"

In all the tragedy of His up-coming crucifixion, Jesus had the perspective and the love and care to give them a warning. *Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.* You've got more to weep about than me!

Imagine the situation. Christ was weakened by a lack of sleep and food and drink and the loss of blood from His whipping. He was only several hours from His own death. Yet, He says their situation is worse than His.

Why?

- He knows the future Jesus gives them a prophecy

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!"'

The Message seems to bring out the meaning quite well

The time is coming when they'll say, 'Lucky the women who never conceived! Lucky the wombs that never gave birth! Lucky the breasts that never gave milk!' Then they'll start calling to the mountains, 'Fall down on us!' calling to the hills, 'Cover us up!' If people do these things to a live, green tree, can you imagine what they'll do with deadwood?"

They were sad because it looked like the end for Jesus. And Jesus is saying "If it looks bad for me, it's not half as bad as it's going to be for you. It would be better that they would never have children.

What is Jesus referring to? Most scholars believe that Jesus is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70 when the Romans put down a Jewish rebellion in a most vicious way. The Jewish Historian recorded the horrors of it which were almost unparalleled until the Holocaust. *He might justly affirm, "if the misfortunes of all, from the beginning of the world, were compared with those of the Jews, they would appear much inferior in the comparison.* It wasn't the first time Jesus had made prophecies of doom about Jerusalem.

Why was this going to happen? One way we could look at it is in terms of judgment. *Deu 28:9 The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. Deu 28:10 And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. Deu 28:11 And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. (ESV)*

Deu 28:15 "But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. Deu 28:16 Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. Deu 28:17 Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Deu 28:18

Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. (ESV)

One of the curses that followed disobedience was on the fruit of their wombs and the same idea comes out in the prophecy of Hosea as God pronounces judgment on the northern kingdom of Israel

***Hos 9:12** Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them till none is left. Woe to them when I depart from them!*

***Hos 13:16** Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword; their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open. (ESV)*

But there's more on the theme of judgement because of disobedience in this passage as Jesus says 30 Then "they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" ' He well may be reflecting on **Hos 10:8** *Israel's favourite sin centres will all be torn down. Thistles and crabgrass will decorate their ruined altars. Then they'll say to the mountains, "Bury us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!" (MSG)*

What's interesting about the history of Josephus is that as the Romans invaded Jerusalem, people hid in caves and underground and the Romans viciously hunted them out and killed them.

What was the destruction of Jerusalem for? Was it due to decadence, secularization, religiosity and other signs of disobedience towards God, or this statement.

Matt 27:24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" 25 All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" (NIV)

That's why Jesus has concern for them. He knew His future and He knew their future. *His was one of joy: Heb 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NIV)*

● It was a warning

31 For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

- This is a rather ambiguous statement- *The language here is obscurely proverbial* – what is Jesus saying here? Let me throw out one idea then you can share back what you think later on. What is a dry tree? It's a dead one. And dead trees are felled and burnt because they are no longer alive, or if they are in an orchard or olive grove, they are obviously non-productive and have to make way for others.

Reflect on some of these verses:

Eze 15:2 "Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? **Eze 15:3** *Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel*

on it? *Eze 15:4 Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything? Eze 15:5 Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it ever be used for anything! Eze 15:6 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Eze 15:7 And I will set my face against them. Though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them, and you will know that I am the LORD, when I set my face against them. Eze 15:8 And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, declares the Lord GOD."*

The meaning may be, "If the fiery persecution of Rome is so consuming that my innocence, though again and again pronounced by the governor himself, is no protection against it, what will that fire do when it envelopes the dry, guilty, rebellious city of Jerusalem"? Or we may make the present and the future grief of the women the point of comparison, and interpret thus: "If they cause such sorrow to the women while the city is like a green tree, how much more when, like a dry, dead tree, it is about to fall".

But is there a wider meaning?

Joh 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Joh 15:6 *If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*

John Gill: *Or it may be rendered impersonally, "if these things are done in a green tree"; by which is meant the Lord Jesus Christ, who is often compared to a tree, as to a green fir tree, an apple tree, a vine, and is called the tree of life: and may be said to be a moist or green tree; because, as a green tree is full of juice, so is he of grace and goodness; as that is flourishing, so was he in the fame of his doctrine and miracles, in the spread of his Gospel, and in the increase of his kingdom and interest.....and now if all these things were done to such an useful, holy, harmless, and innocent person, what shall be done in the dry? by whom wicked men are designed; who, as dry trees are without juice, so are they destitute of grace and righteousness, and all that is good, and bring forth no fruit, neither to God, nor themselves, nor others.*

What we need to understand about this is we re not called to mourn for Jesus. Why should we? He died and He's now risen and reigning. His heart for people is the same on that day He carried His cross – for those He came to save, who face calamity because they have rejected Him, or more likely in our society, just can't be bothered to think about the challenge God places before them in Christ.

There is one other aspect of the journey Jesus made from Pilate's court to Golgotha. As they arrive, Jesus is stripped of His garments in preparation for crucifixion. It's not just a case of that being painful as the garments would have been stuck to His skin. But it wasn't just part of His sufferings, it was part of His humiliation. Jesus hung naked on the cross. It's not as how images often portray Him. You'll remember the degrading pictures taken in an Iraqi jail. In modern Middle Eastern society, being naked in public is utter humiliation and utterly degrading and brings shame on the person and his family. The same was true in those days.

Even worse, the humiliation here was compounded by the fact that the soldiers gambled for His clothes.

Why do we reflect on this each Easter time. Not to make us weep and be sad but to remind us that in His obedience to the Father, He made a way that we could be part of the family of God, not just now but through eternity.

Heb 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NIV)

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Questions.

Draw up a list 5 conclusions you come to as a group about the two questions below.

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?"

1. "Do not weep for me; weep for yourselves." Does Jesus say this to you and to me or was this just intended for Jerusalem in that age or an the future as well?

Reflect on some of these verses and quotes which may be useful in answering this.

Eze 15:2 *"Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? Eze 15:3 Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it? Eze 15:4 Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it, and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything? Eze 15:5 Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it ever be used for anything! Eze 15:6 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Eze 15:7 And I will set my face against them. Though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them, and you will know that I am the LORD, when I set my face against them. Eze 15:8 And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted faithlessly, declares the Lord GOD."*

Dean Farrar *"If they act thus to me, the Innocent and the Holy, what shall be the fate of these, the guilty and the false?" ^{E18} There is here a dramatic prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, in which women especially would be deprived and suffer tribulations. The green tree represents the innocent and holy Saviour in the spirituality and vigor of his life; the dry tree represents the morally dead and sapless people, typified by the fig tree, blasted by his word, four days earlier. ^{E19}*

Online commentator: *The meaning may be, "If the fiery persecution of Rome is so consuming that my innocence, though again and again pronounced by the governor himself, is no protection against it, what will that fire do when it envelopes the dry,*

guilty, rebellious city of Jerusalem"? Or we may make the present and the future grief of the women the point of comparison, and interpret thus: "If they cause such sorrow to the women while the city is like a green tree, how much more when, like a dry, dead tree, it is about to fall".

On Jewish guilt:

Bob Deffinbaugh *I think the words of Jesus do much to explain what is said to the Jews in Acts pertaining to repentance, believing in Jesus as the Christ, and being baptised as a public testimony to their faith. Peter's preaching at Pentecost called upon his Jewish audience to be saved "from this perverse generation" (cf. Acts 2:40). That generation of Israelites who lived in Israel at the time of Jesus, and especially those who lived in Jerusalem, had a particular privilege in seeing and hearing Messiah. They also had a greater guilt for having rejected Him. The sacking of Jerusalem was to be a special judgement of God on that generation and on that city for their rejection of Jesus as God's Messiah.*

On a wider meaning

*Joh 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. **Joh 15:6** If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.*

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2. Reflect on this comment in the light of the humiliation of Jesus

We must not weep because in the cross, in His suffering in our behalf, He is demonstrating His love for us. (Rodney Kleyn)