

Luke 19:28-44 [NIV]

After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'"

³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

³⁴ They replied, "The Lord needs it."

³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

⁴⁰ "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

⁴¹ As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it ⁴² and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ 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. ⁴⁴ 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."

We're in Luke chapter 19, if you'd care to turn there today and notice with me something that is only mentioned, I believe, three times in the New Testament – and that is Jesus crying.

What made Jesus cry?

Well, John 11 tells us that He cried at the death of His friend Lazarus.

Hebrews 5:7 talks in general terms about Jesus' tears and grief throughout His ministry years.

And then we're told here in Luke that Jesus wept as He approached Jerusalem.

Why? What made Jesus cry over Jerusalem?

And I might add, this is actual crying; this is not just getting teary-eyed or red-faced. The word here, *klaio*, translates as more than that. This is a weeping; an audible expression of grief. This is more than just a quiet sob or two, or as the Fonz from "Happy Days" used to say, "I'm getting all misty here."

So, again: what made Jesus respond like this? What made Him cry?

First, let me say again what I said to the kids a few minutes ago: there is a time – a right time – to cry. Our ability and willingness to cry does not diminish personhood or adulthood or masculinity, as many of our cultural stereotypes would have us believe.

For generations in our culture – and not just ours, but in many cultures around the world – men, especially, were raised with the belief that to be considered manly and strong and masculine meant stifling emotion – holding *all* emotion inside.

Boys were shamed for showing emotion or expressing feeling of nearly any kind.

And what that has done is that it has created a lot of people who don't know how to healthily express emotion, and who don't even know what to do with emotion when they feel it – except to keep it stuffed inside.

And that's not good.

So, we would be wise to learn from Jesus and from the ways we see Him expressing Himself in Scripture, because Jesus was a person in touch with His emotions. He was not stoic or sterile, and neither was He over-run and controlled by His emotions. Jesus felt genuinely, and He appropriately expressed that genuine feeling – which sometimes led Him to tears.

And, of course, we know that tears aren't always signs of grief. Sometimes tears come from happiness, sometimes disappointment, sometimes pain, sometimes sorrow.

Sometimes they come from onions, right?

But except for the onions, tears are always expressions of feeling.

So, the point is that Jesus shows us that there's no weakness in feeling or in the expression of feeling, as some might believe.

The Bible tells us repeatedly how Jesus, and those who followed Him, were moved as they witnessed peoples' needs, including spiritual needs.

The fact is, if *you* have wandered far from God in days past, or if you are far from Him today, Jesus has wept over you.

But here in Luke, it is not so much a person as it is a whole city, Jerusalem, that brings Jesus to tears.

Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever been moved to tears, or at least felt a strong, emotional pull, over a place – maybe a city?

I admit that I have, but not for such noble reasons as Jesus'.

The city of Pittsburgh does this to me.

I know that may be puzzling – and even unbelievable – to some of you. You're thinking, "Pittsburgh? Can anything good come from there?"

But Pittsburgh is the closest real city to where I grew up in Ohio – just across the state line, and driving into Pittsburgh is always moving to me.

It's partly because of the memories of visits there with family and friends that it holds – ball games, concerts, shopping trips, museums.

It is partly because of its beauty – the way the city sits there in the river valley.

It's probably also just because of its size. As a kid who grew up in a little town, all real cities are somewhat entrancing to me.

But in addition to all of that, I think part of my emotional response to Pittsburgh has to do with the drama of entering it.

You see, from where I grew up, we would always come into Pittsburgh traveling east on Pittsburgh's Parkway West. The view actually gets hillier and greener the closer you get to downtown, which does not seem right. But because of the way the hills work there, you don't realize how close to downtown you are.

That expressway, Parkway West, leads into the Fort Pitt Tunnels, which cut through – they take you underneath – Mt. Washington. This is all very cool.

But it's when you come out of the tunnel on the other side that's really amazing. When you come out of the tunnel, you are immediately on the Fort Pitt Bridge over the Monongahela River, about 10 stories above the water, and the city is just enormous and right there before you. The buildings are suddenly right in front of you, and you look down on the rivers and bridges and stadiums and the fountain there at Point State Park, where the three rivers come together.

That experience has always been an emotional thing for me, because of the ties I have to that place.

Maybe you can relate to this with a different city.

Maybe it's Cincinnati for you, coming around the turn on I75 and watching the city come into view.

Maybe for you it's New York or Paris or Delhi or Tokyo – or Nicholasville or somewhere else, I don't know.

But I think the experience Jesus had with Jerusalem was similar, because, although He did not grow up there, Jerusalem held a significant place in His heart.

It was a place of great beauty.

It was a place of tremendous history and significance.

It was the cultural center of His people, both earthly and Heavenly.

It was the political capital of the nation. It was where the most important earthly people lived.

It was the home of the Temple – the very dwelling place of God.

It was a place that had been fought over by so many – torn down and rebuilt and expanded.

It was the place of the prophets of the past, and also the place where great things were promised in days to come.

And, even beyond all that, it was the place of Jesus' own future – every step of His life was taken with Jerusalem in mind, in one way or another.

But on this day, it was not the beauty or the history or any other *positive* quality of Jerusalem that made Jesus cry as He came around the bend and topped the rise in the road that revealed the city which was spread out before Him ahead.

As He viewed her great beauty and significance and history and all that she *had*, it was all she *didn't* have that brought Jesus to tears – because for all that was positive about her, there was a *great void* in Jerusalem's soul.

Of course, Jesus knew this already.

A few chapters back, Luke tells us that Jesus, speaking with a group of Pharisees, breaks into lament and says, "*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.*" (Luke 13:34 NIV)

You see, you can possess all the beauty and history and sophistication and power in the world, but none of that can ever make up for the absence of God.

For generations and generations, God, in His great love for, not just the Jews, but for the world of people that the Jews were supposed to lead to God, you see – in God's great love for the *world*, He sent prophet after prophet to Jerusalem, to remind them of who He was and who they were called to be.

Like Jeremiah, for example. He is called the weeping prophet for the very same reason Jesus weeps here. Jeremiah longed for Jerusalem's – Israel's – repentance, and warned them time and again of the destruction that would come unless they would turn back to God.

And through the ages, from warning to warning and prophet to prophet, every once in a great while, Israel *did listen*. Usually that happened when they had absolutely no other choice. When things got so bad and life got so hard for them, they chose God as their last resort.

Every so often, Israel *did* hear the prophet God sent.

But far *more* often, they did not. They ignored God's voice and rejected the grace He offered, because, you see, they had come to think of themselves as too great a people:

too important,

too educated,

too sophisticated,

too contemporary,

too far along in their national evolution to ever think of returning to such a primitive idea as actually depending on God to intervene in their situation.

They were far too developed, too progressive, to think God might actually be speaking to them and that He might actually work in any divine way on their behalf.

Now, the national position was, of course, that they were open to God. They were God's people; after all, they were God's chosen.

God was written all over their national identity.

But the recognition of His name is where His influence stopped for Jerusalem in real life. From day to day, they wanted Him only on their terms, which meant that, in reality, there was no room for God to even get a hearing in their world.

They claimed to be a people of God—a people set apart, a people with a divine call and commission—and yet they were utterly closed to God’s voice and work and way in any real sense, you see? That was Jerusalem; that was Israel; and that’s what made Jesus cry.

To appear to be so full, and yet, in reality, to be so utterly empty of all that truly matters...

It’s just such a shame. It’s such a waste. It’s never God’s choice for a nation, for a people, nor for a person.

In His grace, God always wants redemption.

But He leaves that decision to us, and rejecting His grace always leads to destruction.

God’s inherent righteousness and justice require judgment against sin and sinners and sinful nations—even those He’s raised up, you see? It breaks God’s heart to do it, but it must be done, just the same.

And Jesus knew all that, just as Jeremiah knew it centuries before. Jeremiah predicted Jerusalem’s destruction, which came to pass at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 BC.

And just as Jesus predicts here, so did Jerusalem fall again in the year 70 AD—this time to Rome. Josephus says over a million people perished and nearly 100,000 were carried into captivity.

And it was all because Jerusalem didn’t grasp the time of God’s visitation. In Jesus’ life and words and works, God had been visiting His people, offering them mercy.

And even here on this day—on that hillside overlooking the city—Jesus provided another golden opportunity, offering Himself for their salvation.

But they rejected Him.

Because there was a lot going on in their world, you see?

There was too much that they had to take care of, far too much to do to pay attention to this traveling, trouble-making preacher. They were all so busy—so preoccupied, so concerned about world events, politics, business and feathering their own nests—that they would not be gathered to God’s.

In all the chaotic preoccupation of life in a broken world, they missed God’s invitation to wholeness and wellness and peace.

And the same is true today.

Can you picture Jesus in Washington—standing on the steps of, say, the Lincoln Memorial, on the shore of the Potomac River? To His left, to the north, there’s the White House. Straight ahead of Him, the Washington Monument, and then Capitol Hill beyond that, and the Supreme Court beyond that. To Jesus’ right, toward the south, the Tidal Basin and the Jefferson Memorial.

A city so beautiful, so majestic, and so covered with God’s name and words and principles.

And yet a city filled with people, for years and years—decades, who have no interest in hearing from Him.

Jesus weeps over our nation. He weeps over situations like the one we’re in—the immorality, the distrust, the hostility, the lies, the rejection of God and His holiness.

But you know Jesus also weeps as He stands on the steps of St. Basil’s Cathedral in Red Square and looks over the Kremlin.

And He weeps over the Palace of Versailles in Paris.

And He weeps over Parliament Hill in Ottawa.

And He weeps over Tehran and Berlin and Amman and Cairo and Caracas and Dublin and Havana and Kabul and Lima and Nicaragua and Rome and Stockholm.

From Abu Dhabi to Zagreb, in capital city after capital city, He stands and weeps, because this is the age of grace: the age of invitation, the age of the Spirit. This is the time of repentance and the opportunity of forgiveness for the nations.

This is God’s time of grace, such that “Whosoever will may come!” Jesus says.

“Whosoever will may come! Will you come?”

“Will you repent of your sins and follow me and find grace and peace?”

“Will you come?”

There is something about cities—and especially, but not exclusively, capital cities—that’s not good.

People get confused in cities.

When they’re surrounded on all sides by man-made things, it’s easier for people to forget about God.

Someone once said, “The further people get from the land, the crazier they can become,” and that’s because they forget how nature works. They forget how God ordered things. They forget that there are some things humanity can’t do by itself.

Cities give the impression that humans can control everything, but that’s not really so. And that’s how cities can skew perspectives.

Cities, and especially capital cities, show us what man can do and tempt us to think it’s great. And it can be, so long as God is in it.

But without Him, it’s all empty.

That’s one reason why scripture urges us to pray for those who lead us in government. There is great temptation there to forget God and serve self.

That’s also why God assures us that He’s the one who raises up leaders and puts them down again, because God simply won’t contend with self-serving leaders forever.

If God is not in the leader—if God is not in the capital city, it’s all empty.

And worse than that, as Jesus says, it’s bound for destruction.

And that is certainly, as Jesus shows us, a time to cry.

So, we pray for our leaders and our nations and our cities, and we speak and show truth in love, as the Church is called to do.

But we must also realize that what is true for governments and capitals is also true for people, for individuals.

Our culture teaches us to, almost above all, value appearance: to appear beautiful and strong, powerful and rich, and even to mark ourselves with the things of God.

And so some people, even many people, are like that – like Jerusalem, like capital cities: they appear so majestic, but they are spiritually empty within.

For those people in that circumstance – maybe even those who hear my voice right now, Jesus stands and weeps as He looks upon you, and with all He has, He calls you to Himself.

He calls you, not to just the appearance of greatness, but to that true greatness that comes with receiving Him for who He really is: the God of Gods and King of Kings.

He calls you to repentance and to godliness and holiness and humility and service. He calls you to fullness and to peace.

Jesus knew, here, that it was too late for Jerusalem.

But it's not too late for Washington.

It's not too late for Moscow.

It's not too late for Rome or Stockholm or even Tehran, as unbelievable as that may seem to us.

This is still the age of grace – the age of the Holy Spirit's work on earth. And, if the Church will be the Church, it's not too late for any of these cities and nations.

But even more importantly here today, it's not too late for any *person*. No matter how you may have rejected Jesus in the past, it's not too late to receive His grace and begin following Him.

He stands and weeps and offers His invitation of love and forgiveness and transformation and peace.

Friend, don't miss it, as Jerusalem did.

Jerusalem looked for a political deliverance from Rome.

Jesus came to bring a spiritual deliverance from sin.

Jerusalem wanted someone to conquer Caesar.

Jesus came to conquer Satan.

Jerusalem wanted a new King.

Jesus offered them a different Kingdom.

Jesus' tears were for a people He had come to save, but who would not be saved.

Don't let that people include you.

Jesus stands today and, with tears, offers His invitation.

Do you need to surrender to Jesus?

We know our nation does.

We know nations around the world do.

The question is, do you?

Closing Prayer:

Father, just as there were eyes in Jerusalem who refused to see Jesus for who He is, maybe there are eyes even here who have refused to see.

Just as there were ears in Jerusalem that were so long tuned to the world that they could not tune to your voice, maybe there are ears here in that same condition.

Holy Spirit, would you let the blind see and the deaf hear Your voice – Your truth, so they might embrace Your Savior?

Let it be so here in this place, and let it be so in Washington D. C. today and in Jerusalem and in all the capitals and cities around our world.

May Jesus' tears bring a harvest of righteousness and godliness.

Closing Song: *Softly and Tenderly*

Benediction:

In this Lord's Day, and in the week ahead:

May the Lord bless and keep you.

May He cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

May He lift up His countenance toward you and give you peace.