

Exhortation II: Christ Carries His Cross

Charles Herle (1598-1659)

John 19:17

I. The Text Opened

A. John 19:17

1. “And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha,” (John 19:17).
 - a) The scene that played out on the dirt path leading from the governor’s palace to the hill of Golgotha this particular day was at once the most significant and the most tragic ever observed there.
 - b) Because of the incessant beatings and scourgings Christ had suffered during the last fifteen hours, it was a miracle to those onlookers that he could even walk on his own, much less carry his cross.
 - c) His back was in shreds.
 - d) The rest of his body, what wasn’t covered in both fresh and dried blood, was black and blue from the unrelenting blows he’d suffered.
 - e) His was an image too painful for human eyes, as Isaiah prophesied hundreds of years earlier: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from him,” (Isa. 53:3).
 - (1) *With his strength most nearly gone, he had to bear not only the weight of the cross itself but the immeasurable weight of the sins of all mankind which it represented.*
 - (2) *So, it’s not surprising that, with scarcely enough life left in him to continue each breath, he faints under its weight and sinks to the ground.*
 - f) The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all give an account of what happens next, (Matt. 27:32, Mark 15:21, Luke 23:26).
 - (1) *A man named Simon of Cyrene was on his way back from the country.*
 - (2) *Whether he got caught up in the event out of curiosity or just found himself delayed with the foot traffic of the crowd, Simon ends up a bystander watching Jesus make his way to Golgotha.*
 - (3) *And whether he felt sympathy for the Lord’s plight or not, we don’t know.*
 - (4) *We do know, however, that Roman soldiers seized him and forced him to help Jesus carry his cross the rest of the way up Golgotha’s hill.*

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. Doctrine: How truly do the people in charge here once again strain at a gnat while swallowing the camel?

1. The cross was considered a heathen, (i.e., Roman) death, and so it was listed among the Jews’ many abominations.
 - a) For this reason, they could not even think of touching this tree of infamy.
 - b) And yet, they thought nothing of touching the Lord’s anointed, of crucifying the Lord of glory (Psa. 105:15, Heb. 6:6).
 - (1) *So, Simon, a Gentile, is chosen to carry the Lord’s cross for him.*
2. And in this we have the last representation of the Jews’ rejection of both the burden and the blessing of the cross.

a) Repeating history (Gen. 27, 48:14), God's chosen nation relinquishes the birthright to this kingdom and the blessing of this cross to the Gentile.

(1) And yet Christ does not share the burden of his cross with this Gentile until the Jews had first thrown him out of their synagogue (Mark 15), and now out of their city.

b) Simon the Cyrene is a literal image of Christ's invitation to his people in Matthew 16:24, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

(1) The cross is an instrument of death – a painful, humiliating death.

(2) And yet Christ was willing to endure death on that cross for me.

(3) The question now is whether or not my level of commitment and obedience to him is as deep and as strong as his was for me.

(a) Am I equally willing to endure whatever obedience requires of me?

(b) Am I willing to die to self and follow him?

c) Jesus spoke of this same truth in Luke 9:24, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it."

(1) Nothing in this earthly life is worth trading a life of rapturous glory with Christ for all eternity for.

(2) But to gain the crown of life in glory requires that I walk that road and bear that cross after him now.

d) The blessed Savior bore nothing but the thorns of shame, torture, and death for his people, and yet how plentifully did it bear the grapes of gladness, the olives of peace, the laurel of triumph for them?

(1) To Christians, it is like the ark of Noah that rescues them from the flood waters of death, (Gen. 6).

(2) It is like the rod of Moses that delivers them from Egypt's bitter bondage, (Exod. 4).

(3) It is Jacob's ladder that ties earth and heaven together and makes them transmutable.

(4) It is their shield of truth that Joshua lifted up against spiritual wickedness.

(5) And it is the wood of Isaac, which he carried on his shoulders for a self-sacrifice, required by the Father.

e) Christians ought never be ashamed of the cross he carried for them, though it was thoroughly weighted with the shame of sin when he bore it on that long road to Calvary.

(1) And as difficult as it is, Christians ought never to hide their face from the pain and humiliation of his passion and death, for they know this is the path of life in the end.

f) May they never consider being named among the disciples unless they are fully willing and ready to take up their cross and follow him (Matt. 16:24).

(1) Let them, with Simon, never stop following in his steps until they come to their own Golgotha, their own grave.

(2) For afterward, then, they will be received into glory.

3. As Christ went to Calvary, there were even Women Weeping that followed him.

a) "And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him," (Luke 23:27).

b) Pity is the poorest salve of misery.

c) Our Savior to all his sorrows, and sufferings, his wrongs and wounds has none but this, and this is so far from a salve, as it is one of his tenderest sores.

d) He says to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem weep not for me," (Luke 23:28).

- (1) Some theologians have said it, (I do not know how warrantable), that the sorrow of his passion was not so great, as the sorrow of his compassion.
- (2) However, it cannot, (without question), but largely add to, if not exceed it.
- (3) When the sorrow is great, and the interests near, (as between our Savior and his mother with his other friends), society in sorrow does not so much divide, as multiply, and mutually reflect it.
- (4) We see it in the apostle Paul's complaint, in the same but lighter a case, when he talks about weeping, (he says), and how his heart was broken, (Acts 20).
4. How great is still Christ's love, how triumphant above his grief?
- a) In the midst of all his misery going to the cross Christ does not forget mercy.
- (1) His compassion breaks forth through the thickest of his passion.
- (2) All his sweat and blood cannot drown all his wrongs, and wounds cannot bury the remembrance of his friends.
- (3) In the midst of all their tortures and loudest out-cries of contumely, of blasphemy, he can hear his following friends weeping behind him, and neglect all his own sufferings, to comfort them, "Weep not for me."
- (4) Such is his patience amidst all his tortures, that it tortures his tormentors.
- (5) Such is his love that it comforts his comforters.
- (6) He has more compassion on the women that follow him weeping, then on his own mangled self that reels along fainting, even bleeding to death.
- (7) He feels more the tears that drop from their eyes, then all the blood that flows from his own veins.
- (a) He will not promise a word to Pilate that adjures, (John 19:10), that threatens him.
- (b) No, nor to Herod that entreats, (Luke 23:8), that soothes him, and yet unasked how graciously does he turn about his blessed bleeding face to the weeping women, (verse 28), affording them looks and words too of compassion, of consolation, "Weep not," etc.
- (8) He respects then (we see) tears more than words, the tears of silly women behind his back, then the entreaties, the threats of governors, of kings to his face; yet did he not turn his face to them until he heard them weep, (verse 27); nor may we ever think to see his face in glory, unless we first bathe our own in sorrow.
- (a) Simon the Cyrene no doubt heard such things as he too walk the road along with Christ.
- (b) What did he think of the compassion of the Lord?

III. The Text Applied

A. Christ answers the weeping women, but not questioning Herod, and so, he is ever ready to answer our devotion, but not our curiosity.

1. Solomon, when he dedicates the Temple, prays in this way, 1 Kings 8:52, "Let thine eyes (O Lord) be open to the supplications of thy servants."
 - a) And again, when Hezekiah prays in his sickness, 2 Kings 20:5, "God (he says) he heard his tears."
 - b) So here he hears, and turns to these women's tears without words.
2. What does it mean that God is said in this way to see our prayers, and to hear our tears?
 - (1) Does he hear with eyes, and see with ears?
 - (2) No; but therefore, it is he that is said to see our prayers, because none prevail with him, but such as are (in some sort) made visible to his eyes by deeds.

(3) Therefore, to hear our tears, because it is they that make the best music in his ears, and run the best division on our prayers.

b) If God then does in this way hear best with his eyes, the best way for men to speak, is, with their hands.

(1) To put our prayers under our hands in deeds, as well as put them up with our tongues in words.

(2) To sign them, as well as signify them.

(3) The wicked (Solomon says) walks with an obstinate mouth, (Prov. 6:12).

(4) Let the godly then (his true Antipode) tread opposite to him, and speak with feet that walk toward God, that is, turn all his prayers into paths, tread out every word of them into steps.

(5) So, God shall see his prayers before he hears them, and (as by these women here) hears their tears before he sees them.

(6) It is Solomon's own words, to speak with the feet, and to teach with the fingers.

3. "Ye daughters of Jerusalem weep not," etc.

a) It was a woman that had the first, if not the greatest share in the cause of this his death; and therefore, women shall now have the least share in the execution.

b) If a woman conceived to man, the fruit of death, a woman conceives to man, this fruit of life too.

c) If the woman at first sinned most, they're women too, that here weep most for him.

(1) A woman first brought on man the fall, (Gen 3:12), and a woman first brings to men the resurrection, (John 20:20).

d) The blessed Savior, in his actions (not his miraculous or meritorious, but moral ones) as well as his commands are filled my instructions; and did he not weep for Lazarus, (John 11:35), and for Jerusalem, (Luke 19:41), all the people wept at the death of Moses, all the church at Stephen's, the women lamented the death of Dorcas, that had made them garments, (Acts 9:39), and "ye daughters of Israel, (David says), weep for Saul, (2 Sam. 1:24), who clothed him with scarlet?

e) How much more, Lord, should Christians weep at the remembrance of his death, who has woven for you, and that out of your own blood and heart, that wedding garment of righteousness, and clothed you with that richer scarlet dyed in the blood of the Lamb, (Matt. 22:11; Rev. 7:14).

f) Did the Lord, so flow to us, and in so many showers of blood, in the Garden, the Hall, the Palace, the Post, on the way here, and on the cross later, and may we not drop a tear for all your purple streams?

(1) "Weep not for me."

(2) Yes, Lord, he that here looks back on the women, (Luke 22:28), because they did weep, looked back on Peter, (Luke 22:6), because he should weep.

(3) Among those eight beatitudes, one is blessed that mourns, (Matt. 5:4).

(4) He does not here forbid us weeping, only he turns the stream of your tears the right way, homeward, back into your own heart, pointing you to the truth.

(5) He points you to both cause and subject of all sorrow, your sins, the truest cause too of these your sufferings.

(6) Had Christ suffered in this way, unwillingly, or for himself, we might well have wept for his; but it was for us, and that how freely and how victoriously?

(7) Our head should be, (with Jeremiah's) a fountain of tears, (Jer. 9:1), our tears a sea for him to drive the swine heard of our sins to drown them all, (Matt. 8:32).

(8) So, (with David), may our tears be our meat, our drink, our lodging, feed us with yourself, (Psa. 42:3, 80:5), on the bread of tears, give us plenteousness of tears to drink, and we ought to water our couch with tears, (Psa. 6:6).

4. Let us (with Hezekiah) turn to the wall and weep, (2 Kings 20:2), to the only wall, the bulwark of your safety, and so, every tear shall be a common shot to batter down that wall of partition, that is between us; it is with our eye, that his spouse wounds him, (Eph. 2:14, Song 4:9).

a) It is the sacrifice of a broken, a bleeding heart, that he wilt not despise, (Psa. 51:17).

b) O let us (with Elijah) then first steep our sacrifice in water, (1 Kings 18:34), the water of repentant tears, so, the fire of his love shall not only accept our sacrifice, but (as in that of his) lick up the water too, dry up our tears, and in the end turn (as at Cana) our water into wine, (John 2), our drops of tears, into floods of joy.

(1) These are those waters in which the Lord breaks the heads of those spiritual dragons.

(2) Man's life (in Moses' computation) is just so long as Jerusalem's captivity in Babylon, seventy years, (Psa. 90:10), and what other is it then a captivity?

(3) If not under the tyranny of sin's utter bondage, yet at least under the durance, and restraint of many sinful frailties.

(4) While you live here then, what should you do but rend your garments, cover yourself with sackcloth, and go into your house, (Isa. 37:1) by these waters of sorrow?

(5) You look for your harp of joy, but you should hang it up until you come to the true Jerusalem.

(6) Why should you sing here in a strange land, and that too before the victory, before you have either fought the fight, or finished the course, (2 Tim. 4:7)?