

The Day of Emotion

Sterling UMC

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Luke 19:41-44, Mark 11:12-19

Between now and Easter weekend, we are following Jesus day by day through the last week of his life. This week, from Palm Sunday to Good Friday and on to Resurrection Weekend, was the most important week of Jesus' life. Everything he had done for his entire thirty-three years and especially his three and half year ministry lead up to this week. If we don't understand the significance of his last week, I doubt very much if we grasp who Jesus was and what he to do for us.

Last week we looked at the Transfiguration, an event that was a turning point in Jesus' ministry. From the mountain of transfiguration Jesus would descend to fix his gaze on his final mission, the salvation of the world. That road would take him to Jerusalem where he would spend the final and climatic week of his life.

This morning we pick up Jesus' journey the day after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday. We will talk more about that day on Palm Sunday in a few weeks from now. But today we want to look at the Monday of Jesus' finest week.

Monday reveals a side of Jesus many would rather not have to deal with. Everybody likes a Jesus who teaches us to love our neighbors and takes little children into his arms. People honor a miracle worker who heals the sick and promises to answer our prayers. They eagerly quote the Jesus who says, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." There is something nice and comforting about the baby in the manger, the calmer of storms, and the forgiver of sins. But Monday presents a much different portrait of our Savior. Monday is the Day of Emotion.

Three events take place on this day that illustrates the emotion and passion in the heart and soul of our Lord. First, as he approaches the city, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. Second Jesus curses a barren fig tree. Then finally Jesus enters the temple and forcibly drives the merchants and moneychangers from the outer court. What do these passionate displays of emotion tell us about our Lord? How do they help us to answer the questions we sought to begin to answer last week? What kind of king is this? What kind of kingdom is he ushering in? And what does he expect of his people?

Well I believe these three incidents reveal some very powerful insights into who Jesus is and what he expects from his people. Because they answer three important questions.

Question #1: What make Jesus weep?

After Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem suddenly the parade grinds to a halt. Maybe he rounded a turn coming down the winding path. Perhaps he came to a clearing in the olive groves. He just stops and looks at the big city spread out before him. All the shouts of praise, all the Hosannas, are now replaced by the eerie sound of the agonizing wail

of a broken heart. Jesus was weeping!

Why did Jesus cry that day?

Maybe with nostalgia he thinks back over the centuries of history that has taken place on this same patch of real estate. David, Solomon, Isaiah, Nehemiah, Ezra—all the great heroes of the nation had stood on this same hillside and looked down at this same great city.

But there's more to the tears than nostalgia. Here are at least two reasons:

1. Jesus wept because of superficial belief

He realized the cheering crowd was filled with people who were caught up in the excitement, but they did not truly recognize Him as the Messiah. You see Jesus knew that before the end of the week, the cheers of the fickle crowd would turn to jeers. Some of the ones shouting "crown Him" would be the same ones shouting "crucify Him." Instead of "Hail Him" they'd be shouting, "Nail Him." Jesus saw their superficial belief and it broke His heart.

Today, Jesus must certainly weep when He sees the shallow level of commitment in our lives. Some people come to church on Sunday and sing "Crown Him with many Crowns" and then crucify Jesus with their filthy language and habits on Monday. They sing, "I exalt thee" on Sunday morning and by Tuesday their song is "I Forgot Thee."

2. Jesus wept because of spiritual blindness

Jesus' heart was broken because people did not see Him. They didn't recognize Him for who he really was. He had told his disciples that he had come to die. He would be betrayed by a friend, tormented by his foes, and eventually crucified for the sins of the world. They refused to believe him. They argued with him. The tears were partly over their unbelief.

But the tears flow because he knows what will happen even later. He sees the end from the beginning. He knows the consequences of the rejection he will face that week. He knows the judgment and destruction that will come to this city that has rejected the offer of God's grace. He wanted it to turn out differently. If he were the kind of savior who forces people to follow him, who makes decisions for them, it would be different. But that's not the way it works. A couple of days later, he says, "O 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, but you were not willing" (Mt 23:37).

So here's the question: Does that which makes Jesus cry also break our hearts? Jesus looked at the spiritual blindness and superficial belief in Jerusalem and He wept. When was the last time you wept over your city? We aren't really going to have an

eternal impact on our city until we carry such a burden that we weep for the people here without Jesus.

William Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army. He sent a group of Salvation Army soldiers to a wicked city and they failed in their efforts to reach the people. They telegraphed General Booth reporting they had tried everything, but nothing worked. They tried everything they could think of to touch the people there. They tried feeding them, clothing them, and housing them, but there was no response. They asked for his orders, and General Booth telegraphed two words in response: Try tears.

Question #2: What frustrates Jesus?

The next event in the sequence of the events of the day of emotion is another rather odd happening. Jesus is leaving Bethany and he is hungry. He sees a fig tree in full bloom with plenty of leaves. He reaches into the tree to find a piece of fruit and comes up empty handed. Greatly frustrated Jesus curses the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." The sequel to the story is a few verses later, "In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

You want to know what frustrates Jesus? When he sees promise without performance. That's the lesson of the fig tree. Jesus is frustrated with people who don't walk their talk. Folk who say all the right words and go through all the motions of religion and faith, but fail to produce the fruit of a well lived life.

Jesus was pointing out that those who advertise that they follow God should show that reality in the way they live. In Matthew 7:21 Jesus says, "not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter into Heaven, only he does the will of my Father in Heaven". The Bible is clear, we are not saved by our works . . . we are saved by God's grace alone . . . but once we receive new life from God His Spirit dwells within us and begins the work of changing us.

In Galatians 5:22 we are told, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." There should be evidence of new life in the way we are living.

So here's your question. When Jesus examines your life what will he find? When he reaches his hand into your heart will he be frustrated and find an abundance of leaves and no fruit? Or will he be satisfied by the sweetness of bountiful harvest?

Question #3: What makes Jesus mad?

The final event on this day of emotion is the most dramatic and intense. After pronouncing the curse on the fig tree Jesus moved on toward Jerusalem. Here was this magnificent structure of the temple as the central focus of the city. Because it was Passover time the crowd was thick.

What Jesus saw as he entered the temple area made him sick. Inside the temple area were currency exchange booths. The pilgrims from other countries came to make their offerings to the temple. Unfortunately, the temple would not accept foreign money (it had pictures of foreign rulers which would be a graven image of a false ruler). Consequently, the people had to change their money into temple currency. There was a fee for this service and the fee was pretty steep. So, the pilgrims coming to Jerusalem were getting fleeced!

In other parts of the temple area there were all kind of animals wandering around. The pilgrims would bring their animals to sacrifice to the Lord. An animal sacrifice had to be “without blemish” and therefore had to be inspected. Many (perhaps most) of the animals were rejected. Fortunately, the temple just happened to have some certified “unblemished” animals for sale . . . at a premium price.

This reality turned the temple area into a market-like atmosphere. Merchants were hawking their wares and pilgrims walked in crowded areas.

Jesus couldn't take it. They had turned the house of God into a marketplace. It was no longer a house of worship; it was a place of business. Jesus went into the temple area and overturned the tables of the money-changers (imagine the sound of money all over the place. You can see people scrambling to profit from this explosion of godly anger.) Jesus said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”

This Jesus has fire in his eyes and fierce indignation in his heart. There is no way around it. Jesus was good and mad.

For some people this raises a bit of a problem. Some define anger as a sin. But the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was without sin. How do we make this match up? Perhaps we are misreading Jesus' attitude. More likely, we misunderstand anger.

I remember hearing one of my seminary professors Dr. David Seamands once say, “The person who cannot feel anger at evil is a person who lacks enthusiasm for good. If you cannot hate wrong, it's very questionable whether you really love righteousness.” That explains a rather curious statement in the New Testament. Ephesians 4: 26 says, “In your anger do not sin.” In other words, temper tantrums are always evil. Anger that boils over into vile words and vengeful attacks is never good. But a person who does not feel angry and indignant at evil knows nothing of the righteousness of God.

And that is exactly what is going on here. In a visible and demonstrative way Jesus was expressing his righteous indignation over the fact that the temple was no longer a house of prayer; it was a place of corruption.

So the question we must ask is this: “Would Jesus be upset at what he sees in the church today?” Has our worship become superficial and materialistic?

You see I don't think this is a passage concerned about youth sponsored missions fundraisers or UMW bake sales or dinners or the sale of resources at the church. I think Jesus was less concerned about the exchange of money and animals than he was the corruption involved in these things. These people were making a mockery of faith.

So the question is what makes Jesus mad about the church today?

I think Jesus is mad When there is a pursuit of profit rather than a pursuit of holiness. Obviously, sometimes a church does become more focused on money than godliness. There are times when our first question is "how much came in?" rather than "has our soul taken another step toward holiness?"

I think Jesus gets angry When our worship focuses on humans and not God. When our worship is consumer driven rather than God-driven, we are just like the money-changers. When we stop asking "what will bring God honor?" When we pray prayers that are designed to impress others rather than communicate with the Lord, we are more concerned with promoting ourselves than we are with proclaiming the gospel. We have corrupted God's house.

I think Jesus is furious When our words are plastic and not real. The church can be filled with people who know all the right words but have nothing behind the words. They talk about being "blessed"; "spirit-filled"; "sanctified"; or "born again". In our prayers we ask God to "lead us" and "bless us" but the words are merely platitudes that mean very little.

I think Jesus is angry When rules are emphasized over relationship. There are times when the church seems to be a place where the most important thing is following the rules. You need to stand up and sit down at the right time; you need to read the right version of the Bible; dress in the correct way; sit in the proper pew and keep the service within the appropriate time limit. If you do these things, everyone is happy and can go on their merry way. But all the while our relationship with the Lord remains distant and cold.

I think Jesus is angry at profession without prayer. Jesus said, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." I wonder which came first—the corruption or the prayerlessness. I suspect the prayerlessness. When anyone loses that vital, first-person connection with God, anything can happen. The wheels of religion may still turn. The hymns may still go up. The rituals may all be kept with meticulous precision. Everyone may still mouth the right words. But when praying ceases, the real power is gone.

Finally, Jesus gets mad at practice without purpose. From the beginning, the Lord had made it plain that the Jews were his chosen people for one reason and one reason only. They were to be a channel of blessing for all nations. It was never just about them. It was always about God's eternal plan to reach people of every nation, tribe, and tongue

with the message of salvation through the promised Messiah. That's the part they had forgotten.

It is not just the Jews who can lose sight of God's eternal purpose. Anyone who thinks they have an exclusive right to forgiveness or thinks the church exists for their comfort and convenience makes the same mistake. So do people who argue that charity begins at home as an excuse for not supporting missions. As do those of who are tempted to see the church as a country club for the saints rather than as a hospital for sinners. It is not about us. Our God still wants all people to hear the message of Jesus, people across the street, across the tracks, and across the globe. Jesus doesn't like it when we forget that. It makes him good and mad.

This morning we have gotten an inside look at the heart and soul, the passion, the emotion of Jesus. We have seen those things that make him weep, the things that frustrate him, and the things that make him mad. And as we know this season of Lent is a time of reflection and self-examination. So this morning and this week I want you to imagine Jesus looking out over this congregation, or into your heart, does what he sees make him weep? Envision Jesus reaching his hand into the leaves of this church, or into the leaves of your soul. Does what he finds or doesn't find frustrate him? Imagine Jesus entering the temple of your life, or this temple his church. Does what he sees make him mad?

Let us pray: Lord, we want to be pleasing in your sight. Help us Lord so that with our words, our attitudes, our actions we make you smile. Lord, we want our lives to be fruitful. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that our lives bear an abundant harvest of the fruits of the Spirit. And Lord we want to bring you pleasure. Help us to focus on you; on your will and your ways. Help us to be real and authentic with you and one another. Order our lives according to your will that our priorities might align with your desire for us. And most of all help us to keep our eyes upon Jesus. In the remainder of the Lenten journey draw us ever closer to you. This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.