
GROWTH GROUP LENT 2017 – AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS
WEEK 2 – MARCH 12, 2017 - LUKE 23:26-31

GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

1) Did you have a least favorite chore when you were growing up? What was it?

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Barabbas has now been released and Jesus is sentenced to death by crucifixion, a barbaric way to die. People were typically flogged before their crucifixion, they could be carried out and sometimes they died before being taken away to be executed. Luke does not address the flogging and moves to Jesus carrying the cross beam out of Jerusalem. The cross typically consisted of two beams and criminals were forced to carry the cross beam/horizontal piece. The vertical post was sunk in the ground and remained at the site.

As they led Jesus away they seized Simon of Cyrene and made him carry the beam behind Jesus. The Greek language makes it clear that Simon had no choice but to carry the cross. We are not told why Simon was chosen or why he was making his way into town. Many believe that there is a connection between him and the Alexander and Rufus mentioned in Acts and Romans (see question #3)

Once again, a crowd follows Jesus, but only in the gospel of Luke do we have this exchange between Jesus and some of the women who were a part of that crowd. This is a funeral procession. There is wailing and mourning. History tells us that there was actually a group of women who sought to give condemned victims a drugged drink (made of wine and frankincense) that would relieve some of the pain of crucifixion. It is unknown if this is the group Luke is referring to.

Regardless, Jesus makes it clear that the tears being shed should not be shed for him, but for the future of Jerusalem. Jesus had predicted that Jerusalem would fall, which it did in 70 AD. There was tribulation that was coming and Jesus says it will be better for you not to have had children. This certainly had to be disconcerting to those who heard him share these words on the way to the cross.



Jesus offers somewhat of a riddle about green trees and dying trees. If Jesus is the green tree, who brings life, is innocent and is not going to be spared, then, Jerusalem, which is sinful, is in a far worse place than Jesus. The end of Jerusalem will not be pleasant, which history confirms.

In all of this, we see again the sovereignty of God. There is a plan. There is judgment. There is judgment on Jerusalem for not following the ways of God and for worshipping idols. There is also judgment on Jesus who takes on the sin of the world, so that his followers might know forgiveness and mercy.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read Luke 23:26-31

²⁶ As the soldiers 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 childless 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 people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

- 2) Do you find it strange or surprising that Simon was enlisted to help carry the cross of Christ? Does that impact your thinking at all about Jesus being fully God and fully human?
- 3) In the gospel of Mark we are told that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). It is also thought that these are the same people mentioned in Acts 19:33 and Romans 16:13. If they are, it means that Simon was a follower of Jesus and passed his faith onto his sons. As you think about your own life, is there someone who you could say you are passing the faith along to? How are you doing that?
- 4) Read Zechariah 12:10-14: ¹⁰ *"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. ¹¹ On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. ¹² The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, ¹³ the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, ¹⁴ and all the rest of the clans and their wives."*

This passage seems to foreshadow some of the ideas that Jesus is trying to convey to the women who followed him.

- a) Why does Jesus tell the daughters of Jerusalem to weep for themselves and their children?
- b) What does this say about the meaning of Jesus' death as it relates to the future of Israel?
- c) Zechariah 12:10 also talks about grace and mercy. How are these two ideas connected to the death of Jesus on the cross?

- 5) There is a sense that the leaders of the Jewish religion “missed” the truth that Jesus was trying to communicate. Can you think of a time in your life when you “missed the message” Jesus was trying to convey to you?
- 6) In Matthew 16:24-26 Jesus says: ²⁴ “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

Jesus was obviously not talking literally as he spoke those words, but what do you think he meant by them. What does it mean to you for someone to carry the cross of Jesus? Is it about self-denial, a willingness to suffer, or even the idea of dying to self? Or do you have another idea?

BRINGING IT HOME

- 7) As you think about your own life, where is Jesus asking you to take up your cross and follow him?