

The Cross and Judgement
(Jesus, Minneapolis, ICE, and You)
Text: Luke 23:26–31

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. ²⁸ But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ ³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

Big Idea: On the road to the cross, Jesus reveals that the deepest tragedy is not his suffering, but the judgment coming upon a people who do not see what they are doing.

Introduction: Is what is happening in Minneapolis troubling you, one way or another? I think this text has a word for you.

Luke slows the story down here to let us see Jesus on the way to Golgotha.

- The trial is over.
- The verdict has been delivered.
- The cross is already decided.

And yet, on the way to execution, Jesus continues to think of others, showing compassion to the people along the street he is walking. Even under the weight of the cross, he is still interpreting reality, still speaking truth, still calling people to see rightly and interpret life correctly. He does so for us also.

This scene shows us what it means to follow Jesus when suffering is unavoidable, and why tears alone are insufficient to end the world’s suffering or to adequately solve the problems we face.

First: A Forced Follower (vv. 26) - Simon of Cyrene Carries the Cross

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus.

We don't know anything about Simon before this moment. We do know that he does not volunteer. Rome seized him, pulled out of the crowd, and compelled him to carry the cross behind Jesus.

Luke is intentional with that phrase: *“behind Jesus.”*

This is not just a matter of mechanics, making the cross manageable to carry. Nor is it accidental.

Earlier in Luke, Jesus said, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”* (Luke 9:23). Now, that saying becomes literal.

Let me say a few words about Simon:

Simon reminds us that:

- Discipleship often begins uninvited (That's what Minneapolis is doing for many people).
- For many people, following Jesus may start as interruption before it becomes devotion.
- Bearing the cross is not simply a metaphor. It is costly reality. (What is it costing you to love God and others before yourself?)
- No one who truly carries Christ's cross remains unchanged.

IMP: Simon is carrying a cross before he understands the cross. He stands in for a world that cannot rightly interpret suffering and only gets sorrowful or angry with others or God when they see it or endure it.

Transition: But Simon is not the only one following Jesus that day. Luke turns our attention from the road to the crowd, and especially to the women who are following Jesus in a different way than Simon.

Second: Tears That Miss the Point (vv. 27–28) - The Daughters of Jerusalem Weep

And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. ²⁸ But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”

These women are not mocking Jesus. They are mourning him. Their grief is sincere.

And yet, Jesus stops and corrects them – *“Do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”*

This is startling but important. The Innocent One rejects misplaced compassion.

Why? Because their tears recognize suffering, but not it’s real cause, a world under God’s judgment for rejecting Jesus.

Matthew 23:37 - O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!

These women feel sorrow, but don’t yet see the cross as God’s means to alleviate it. This is a call to the church to wake up and see the world in its sin-cursed form and the cross as the only remedy.

Instead, these women see a tragedy, but they don’t understand its meaning.

IMP: There is a kind of compassion that cannot see or refuses to see sin as the cause of suffering. Without that divinely bestowed sight, we blame each other or others. But the world cannot know the cure, and well-intentioned though it may be, wastes time, energy and resources on things that only exasperate everyone and make the situation worse.

Transition: Jesus then explains *why* their tears are misdirected—by pointing to what is coming.

Third: When Blessings Reverse (vv. 29–30) - A Coming Day of Desperation

For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!'³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'

Think about that. Jesus speaks of a future judgement so severe that barrenness will be called a blessing and motherhood a curse. This reverses everything Scripture normally celebrates.

He then quotes language of cosmic terror: - *"They will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'"*

This is judgment language used elsewhere to describe divine reckoning.

IMP: Jesus is saying: *If you think this is the worst day, you do not yet understand what is happening.* This is what our world is seeing; what they think are the worst days. But these days have occurred before. And will occur again. We are all seeing but, to understand, we must put on our cross-colored glasses.

We must see what is transpiring in our world through God's eyes; the result of sin and solvable only by the power of Christ's death and resurrection. And this is why the church, and you, must remain gospel-centered and gospel-focused; because only the gospel can solve our dilemmas.

Transition: Then comes the proverb that explains it all.

Fourth: Green Wood and Dry Wood (v. 31) - The Logic of Judgment

For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?

At this point, you may be thinking, *"Where did that come from and what does it mean?"*

- Jesus is the green wood: alive, innocent, full of life.
- Jerusalem is the dry wood: brittle, hardened, ready for burning.

Oh wow. If Rome and Israel can do this to the Innocent One, what will happen when judgment falls on the guilty?

This is not bitterness. This is mercy speaking truth before it is too late.

IMP: The cross is not just about what humans do to Jesus. It is about what God is doing through Jesus *for* sinners and what will happen to sinners who reject Jesus.

This friends, is the most important question. If we seek justice, peace, etc., before knowing and loving Jesus first and most, it's like loving the world before or more than we love God. That's a reversing of the great commandment.

If we don't love God first and most, then we won't love the world as we should. And so, in our relations to friends or foes, we must be God-centered, cross-centered, gospel-centered, asking, "*What does Jesus require of me in these moments?*"

Reversing our order of affection and exchanging love for God with love for people, ourselves or others, on either side of any issue, (consider Minneapolis and ICE), doesn't really solve the problems that face us. (That's what these women watching Jesus are doing)

Transition: This means that Jesus' last statement reorients everything toward his death, burial, resurrection and exaltation. And each of these steps of Christ's passion must be considered for us to rightly interpret and act in our own times.

Fifth: The Cross Reinterprets Everything

This moment reframes suffering, judgment, and discipleship.

- Simon shows us that following Jesus often begins before understanding. That's what we call discipleship.
- The women show us that
 - emotion without repentance,
 - sorrow without conversion,
 - compassion without a new heart,

is never sufficient to heal us, others or the world.

- Jesus shows us that the cross is both salvation and warning.

The same cross that saves also exposes us.

Application:

1. Do not confuse sympathy for Christianity. Feeling bad about Jesus or others – and you choose the ‘others,’ you side with – is not the same thing as knowing and loving God.
2. Do not assume suffering means God is absent. Here, God is suffering and suffering is the very place God is acting most decisively. I think that’s true of what we are witnessing in Minneapolis.
3. Ask whether you are following Jesus—or merely watching him. Simon carries the cross. The crowd watches. Only one is behind Jesus. Which are you? Where are you?
4. **Invitation:** Let the cross correct your vision so that it can correct everything else about you, including your destiny. Jesus warns us so that we don’t misinterpret what is happening to him, or in our world, and eternal judgment becomes the final word.

Conclusion:

On the road to the cross, Jesus reveals that the deepest tragedy is not his suffering, and as such, not the suffering of the world, but the judgment coming upon a people who do not see what they are doing, not to him, but to themselves.

And even as he walks toward death, he speaks with mercy, urging those around him not to weep for a dying man, but for hearts that refuse to turn to the dying man.

How might we apply this to our day? Let me give you one example -

- The question is not, like the women who followed Jesus, whether we deeply feel something when we witness suffering, the cross in particular, or suffering in general. We do.
- The question is whether we follow the One who carried the cross for us and the world, enabling us to see a suffering world rightly, a world in need of

repentance more than the answers or fix we think we can provide, regardless the side we take on any issue.

- Without that view, we can't really solve the problems that ail us and everyone else. Without that view, we, like our unsaved friends, tend to add to the confusion and hurt ourselves and others in the process.
- If we do not apply the cross to any suffering, we're just weepy or angry, driven by our emotions and not the gospel. We may feel justified, on the right side, and/or temporarily good, but in the end, it is another way the enemy diverts our attention from what really matters; the cross.
- To keep this God-focus, and to be people of reconciliation, we, regardless of the world's attitude, need to maintain a posture of repentance constantly *"turn[ing] to God from idols to serve the living and true God, (1 Thess 1:9)*. Have I made an idol of my suffering or the world's hardship, of my political views?
- We keep this cross-centered view *"so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes"* And yes, the enemy can take something important and meaningful like suffering and by *"human cunning and craftiness"* turn it into a *'deceitful scheme'* to separate us from Jesus, the church or others. (Ephesians 4:14).
- But we have to gain and keep that sight of the cross, before we can do anything about the world's suffering.
- Finally, think on this, dear friend, and challenge your friends and family to do the same. If, *"while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life"* (Romans 5:10). If the reconciling Spirit of God lives in you, how much more can the life of Christ in you, reconcile you to the people around you...even your enemies and neighbors, whom we are commanded to love as ourselves? (Mark 10:31).

The church cannot ignore the world around us. Like Spurgeon encourages us, we must preach, teach and view the world with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in

the other. But as Christians, we must do so as Christians...or we must acknowledge we are not.

An excursus: Think about the whole record of Scripture which can be summed up in 2 Corinthians 5:19, which reads, “... *in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself...*”

This is the message of the Bible. God is reconciling the world to himself. On the other hand,

Satan, GR/*Satanas* (Σατανᾶς) = “the adversary,” stands in opposition to God’s work. This word comes straight from the Hebrew *śāṭān*, meaning opponent or accuser in a legal sense.

- Satan is his name
- Diabolos is his strategy

GR / *Diabolos* = devil

- dia (διά) = “through,” “across,” or “between”
- ballō (βάλλω) = “to throw”

Put together, diabolos literally means: “*one who throws across,*” “*one who casts through,*” or more idiomatically, “*one who slanders*” or “*one who drives a wedge.*”

That metaphor matters.

In Greek usage, *diabolos* was not originally a Christian or even a supernatural term. It simply described:

- a slanderer
- a false accuser
- someone who breaks relationships by accusation

Only later do the Bibler authors take that word and apply it as a title for Satan, emphasizing what he does, not merely who he is.

Here's the theological weight of the word. Biblically, the devil is not first defined as a tempter, ruler, or monster, but as:

- the one who separates
- the one who accuses
- the one who distorts truth to fracture trust

This aligns perfectly with:

- Genesis 3 (sowing suspicion about God)
- Job 1–2 (accusing God's servant)
- Revelation 12:10 (*"the accuser of our brothers"*)

So when Scripture calls him *ho diabolos*, the devil, it is saying: *"This is the one who sows division between God and humanity, between citizens of countries and cities, between Christian brothers and sisters and between husbands and wives, parents and children, siblings and siblings. This is the devil's work."*

dia + *ballō*, it is not a casual compound coined on the spot by biblical authors. By the time of the New Testament, it was already a well-established Greek word meaning slanderer. The biblical writers intentionally choose that word because of its meaning.

In short, *diabolos* reveals the devil's primary strategy, not just his identity, which is Satan, Satanas (Σατανᾶς) = *"the adversary"*

A pastoral admonition: Don't let Satan trick you as he did our first parents in the Garden. Do God's work of reconciliation. Don't do the devil's work of dividing. Are you accusing brothers and/or sisters who disagree with you about world events? Are you fracturing relationships within the body of Christ, with friends or your family because of these issues?

Focus on the Christ and his cross and it will bring you together in love, even with those with whom you disagree most. That's what the gospel does, *"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross"* (Colossians 1:19-20)