

Hebrews 5:1-9

Strong Crying and Tears

Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared – v. 7.

We often think of the Gospels as being those books in the New Testament that supply us with the historical narratives of Christ's life and ministry in this world as well as the narratives of His death and resurrection. And we just as often think of the epistles as being those books in the New Testament that supply us with the doctrines that are based on the historical narratives of Christ. The gospels supply the history – the epistles supply the doctrine. That's the general rule of thumb.

It's not a hard and fast rule, however. It would not be true to say that the Gospels never convey doctrine to us. The sermon on the mount has to be one of the richest doctrinal portions of all the New Testament.

And just as we may find doctrine in the Gospels, so there are rare occasions when you find something added to the historical narrative of the Gospels by a statement in an epistle that you don't actually find in historical narrative itself. Our text this morning is a case in point. We are given a glimpse into the life of Christ that you don't find recorded in the Gospels when you read in v. 7 of how Christ, in the days of His flesh offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears.

What an up-close and intimate view this statement gives us of the deep emotional feelings of Christ. Not only did He offer prayers and supplications during His time in this world but He did so with the kind of fervency and heart-felt burden that brought forth from Him not merely a sigh and a single tear that might drop through moistened eyes but rather strong cryings and many tears. The word *strong* is more often translated by the English word *mighty*. And on at least one occasion it's translated by the word *powerful*.

Here then is the picture we're given of our Redeemer in the place of prayer. He offered up prayers and supplications with mighty cryings or powerful cryings accompanied with many tears which conveys to us the idea of profuse weeping. I think you could say that Jeremiah the prophet resembled in some measure our Savior when the prophet expressed the desire to cry in prayer by saying in Jer 9:1 *Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*

What Jeremiah would wish for and see the need for in terms of his burden for souls Christ would exemplify. I think our text proves this when we read of Christ offering prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears. The gospels do, of course, reveal a weeping Savior to us. We find Christ weeping at the grave of Lazarus in John 11 and we find Him weeping over the doomed city of Jerusalem in Luke 19:41. The detail that our text in Heb. 5 adds to the narrative of our Savior weeping is the force of that weeping which magnifies to us all the more the heart-felt burden of Christ.

It's interesting to note the comparisons of the texts in Heb. 5:7 and the narrative accounts of Christ weeping in Jn. 11 and Luke 19. A case could be made for saying that in each particular instance you can draw a connection to one of the 3 mediatorial offices of Christ as our prophet, priest, and king.

In Jn. 11 we find Christ weeping over the grave of Lazarus and in that account it may be argued that we find Christ revealed in His kingly office. He would, on that occasion, demonstrate that He ruled over death when He would call out *Lazarus, come forth!* And with such a word coming from One with such authority there was no way that death could keep its prey. Lazarus must and did come forth from the grave.

In Lk. 19 we find Christ weeping over the city of Jerusalem. There is a clear connection in that scene to Christ's prophetic office for we find Him there foretelling the doom of that city on account of its rejection of Christ. And what Christ foretold came to pass when the city was tragically and completely destroyed in 70 A.D.

And while the words of our text make reference to the entire earthly ministry of Christ by calling our attention to *the days of His flesh*, I think the text makes particular reference to the agony of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. There was a spiritual battle taking place in that garden. And Christ's testimony to His disciples was that His soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death (Mt. 26:38). And I believe that Christ gained the victory in that battle – as our text says *He was heard, in that he feared*. And it was this spiritual victory that enabled Him to go forward to accomplish what He aimed to accomplish by His atoning death.

What I want you to see now from the context of Heb. 5 is that reference is being made to Christ as a priest – *Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec* – v. 10. And so we find all 3 of Christ's offices represented in the passages that speak of His weeping.

As we meet around the Lord's table this morning to remember the broken body and shed blood of Christ, I think it's appropriate to pay special attention to the strong crying and tears of our Savior. And the question I'd like to raise and then answer today is this:

What Should the Strong Crying and Tears of Christ Bring to Our Remembrance?

The Strong Crying and Tears of Christ Should bring to our remembrance:

I. The Plight of Sinful Men

If ever man had occasion to weep, he should weep over the plight of his sin. I'm reminded of that scene in Luke's gospel where Christ was making His way to Mt. Calvary. He was, even before He was nailed to a cross, a pitiable sight to behold. He had already been whipped and beaten in the course of the Roman soldiers dealings with Him. His face was by that time already marred beyond recognition and so pitiable was the sight that we're told in Lu 23:27 that *there followed him a great company of people, and of women,*

which also bewailed and lamented him. They were weeping for Christ but Christ wouldn't have their pity. They really hadn't gotten to the heart of what was truly pitiable. Their sympathy, you see, was sympathy toward a victim – it was a humanitarian sympathy, if you will, for anyone, innocent or guilty, who would have to be subjected to such cruel treatment. And while such sympathy is not to be despised, neither does such sympathy get to the heart of the matter of the plight of sinners.

And so turning to those women Christ says to them in the next verse – *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.* And then He goes on to foretell the doom that would soon be upon the city of Jerusalem – a doom that would come because they failed to recognize the day of their visitation from the Son of God. A doom that would be the result of their spiritual barrenness and their hard-heartedness toward the Son of God.

As our text brings to our remembrance Christ's deep agony in the garden of Gethsemane we can't help but wonder if one of the pressing burdens that weighed heavily upon Him, that brought forth strong cryings and tears from Him would be the burden of the question – *how did it come to this?* How did man, being created in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness so manage to destroy himself and make the sufferings of Christ necessary if sinners were to be saved?

How is it that we can look through the annals of history and find ourselves dividing history into sections that are marked by the cruel ravages of war and destruction? That was something that used to trouble me in the days that preceded my conversion to Christ. Why is mankind so bent on its own destruction? Why do nations compete for ways that will be more effective to destroy other nations?

Of course what we ask on a national level can also be asked on a personal level. How do people we know and love set themselves on a path that they know will result in misery and yet they pursue such a path with fixed determination? Christ Himself supplies the answer in Jn. 3:19 *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* It's the love of sin that brings men and women and young people to their own undoing. Such is the strength of their love for sin that they'll hug it all the way to hell and in hell they'll lament their lack of access to sin's pleasures.

It was the love of sin that led the Jews of Christ's day to reject Him. In spite of all He taught and all the miracles He performed and all the compassion He showed toward those in need, still in the end they beat Him and whipped Him and despised and rejected Him and called for His crucifixion. Even the pagan ruler, Pilate, was astonished at their venom. *Why, what evil has he done?* – he asks them. He had done no evil. He had only gone about doing good. But no matter – such is the strength of inbred sin that the calls come forth for His crucifixion.

And Christ, knowing what terrible things awaited Him being astonished that the sin of man would go so far as to reject and betray and deny Him and at last crucify Him would

offer up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears. What a blessing to know that we have a Savior that weeps for those who don't know to weep for themselves. As we remember Him around the table of the Lord, this morning, let's never forget that it was the sinful plight of man that brought forth strong crying and tears from our Savior. We know this because we behold Him weeping over the doomed city of Jerusalem and we know this because we behold Him weeping at the grave of a departed friend, Lazarus.

We should, this morning, take to heart Christ's words to those women of Jerusalem and not weep over the sight of a bruised and beaten innocent man but weep instead over the sad truth that it was your sin and mine that brought the holy, harmless, Son of God to such a place.

We see, then, that the remembrance of Christ's strong crying and tears should bring to our minds the sinful plight of man. Would you think with me next that the strong crying and tears of our Lord should bring to our remembrance:

II. The Punishment of Christ

When our text speaks to us of strong crying and tears I believe that those cries and tears were not only on account of man's sinful plight but they were also on account of Christ's knowledge of what man's sinful plight was going to cost Christ.

We know, of course, that the punishment Christ would bear for sinners would be great physically. His body would be broken. The weight of His scourgings and beatings would be such that it would exceed His human strength – so much so that we read in Lk. 23:26 *And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear [it] after Jesus.*

Such was the ingenuity of the Romans that they managed to invent a mode of execution that was unlike any other in terms of the pain that it would produce. Crucifixion was a slow and torturous mode of death. This torture was foreseen by the Psalmist centuries earlier when he wrote in Psalm 22:14,15 *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*

But not only was the physical pain great that our Savior endured, but He knew also the emotional pain of rejection. He knew the heart break of being deserted by those that had been closest to Him. He felt the sting of being mocked and derided. *They gaped upon me [with] their mouths,* The Psalmist prophesies in Psalm 22:13 *as a ravening and a roaring lion.*

These physical and emotional pains were great that our Savior endured. But I don't think that they, in and of themselves, would have led to the strong crying and tears that we read of in our text. You see all the while our Savior endured His scourging and His beatings and the mocking He received at the hands of men He was for the most part silent – so much so that it caused Pilate to marvel. And so Peter tells us in his first epistle, referring to Isaiah

53 that *Christ did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously* (1Pet. 2:22,23). Or as Isaiah puts it in Isa 53:7 *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

So Christ remained remarkably silent throughout His physical and emotional pains. These sufferings, however, were only a portion of Christ's passion. I speak reverently when I suggest that they were the smaller portion of His passion. The thing that brought forth strong crying and many tears, I believe, was the awful agony of knowing that as the crowning penal affliction of His atoning death Christ must be forsaken of His Father. He must be forsaken because our sins were imputed to Him. As J.C. Ryle notes: *The weight that pressed down our Lord's soul, was not the fear of death, and its pains. Thousands have endured the most agonizing sufferings of body, and died without a groan, and so, no doubt, might our Lord. But the real weight that bowed down the heart of Jesus, was the weight of the sin of the world, which seems to have now pressed down upon Him with peculiar force. It was the burden of our guilt imputed to Him, which was now laid on Him, as on the head of the scapegoat. How great that burden must have been, no heart of man can conceive. It is known only to God.*

And because the guilt of our sin was imputed to Him Christ must forfeit the favor of His Father. I believe it is in reference to this affliction that with strong crying and many tears Christ would pray – *O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt* (Mt. 26:39). We also read that at the time of this crowning penal affliction *about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* (Mt. 27:46).

So the strong cryings and tears of Christ should bring to our remembrance the plight of sinful men. How could it come to this? – Christ might ask. How could it come to the necessity of what Christ would endure? It was on account of our sins that He must die – the just for the unjust. And the strong cryings and tears of Christ should bring to our remembrance the punishment of Christ. His body was broken and His blood was shed for us. And such was the agony of such a punishment, especially the punishment of being forsaken by His Father that it would bring forth strong crying and tears from our Lord.

But would you consider with me finally that the strong crying and tears of Christ should bring to our remembrance:

III. The Incomprehensible Love of God

Why is it that Christ would pray and intercede with strong crying and tears? Is it not because He had throughout the ages known intimate communion and favor and love with His Father? All that He did while in this world He did with an aim to glorifying His Father and pleasing His Father. *The Father hath not left me alone*, Christ says in Jn. 8:29 *for I do always those things that please him.*

But in the garden of Gethsemane Christ contemplates the fact that His Father would leave Him alone. The only way we can begin to comprehend the dread and the pain this would bring to Christ is by trying to grasp or comprehend in some measure the love-bond that existed throughout the ages between God the Father and God the Son.

Why, then, would the Father and the Son allow that love-bond to be severed as the crowning penal affliction of Christ's atoning death? The answer must be found in the willingness of both the Father and the Son to set their love on poor, vile, and guilty sinners such as you and me. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life* (Jn. 3:16).

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:7,8). The pain and anguish, the shame and scoffing rude, the derision of sinners and especially His willingness to be cut off for a time from His Father – these things become something of a gauge by which we can measure His for us.

One of the reasons we remember Christ around His table, the way we do, is to strive – to strive to comprehend that which is incomprehensible – even the soul searching, heart filling love of Christ. It is here especially that we strive to *comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God* (Eph. 3:18,19).

How I hope and pray that Christ Himself will draw near to you this day. It would be a shame to so focus on the love of our Redeemer in our study of His word and then miss the experience of having that love shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit when we meet around the Lord's table.

There is another mention of tears, you know, that we find in Ps 42:3 *My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?* We cannot stand it and we should not accept it when our God seems so distant from us that it provides occasion for the heathen to mock.

And yet the Lord does find it necessary at times to withdraw Himself from us in order to draw us out to Him. May the remembrance of His strong crying and tears this day be the very thing to kindle the flame of devotion in our hearts to Him and then to fan that flame into a blaze.

His strong crying and tears which show us so intimately the burden He bore as well as His willingness to see the matter of our salvation through speaks powerfully of the greatness of His love to us. May we be enabled, with the Spirit's help, of showing our love back to Him by partaking of the Lord's table this morning.