

His Stumbling Steps And Thoughts Luke 23:27-31

As I take notice of the world around me each day, driving in my car, shopping in the stores, and especially, within all the many, many activities being generated by our younger aged folks, sports, music venues and those sorts of things. There seems to be no thought about any of it ever coming to an end. Everything seems to simply build upon itself with a promise that there will always, always be more.

As that famous line in the movie "Annie" refrained, "The sun will come out tomorrow". And it does! And so, we assume that yes, it always will.

But there is another reality that our Lord has placed within this existence that He has given to humankind. And that is that while yes, in one sense there truly will always be a "Tomorrow", someday an "Eternal Tomorrow".

But because of all the sin-filled choices that have taken control within the hearts of men and women, our "tomorrows" within this human lifetime now have limits to them, a "season" that is spoken about in the Book of Ecclesiastes where we are told that there will be, "a time to live and a time to die".

But though that be true, most bible scholars agree that our lives on this earth were not originally intended to be for only a "season", but for an eternity. And it was only the "sin" that mankind chose for themselves that altered that course and brought a limitation, a "season", to our lifetimes in the flesh.

Now here, in the passage that we'll study today, we see this "season" taking place in the earthbound life of our Lord Jesus as He walked the last few steps of His lifetime in His flesh, stumbling through the streets of Jerusalem on the way to His death.

And while yes, His death was surely the most tragic event in all of human history, it was also, at the same time, the most important, the most meaningful and most needful gift that mankind would ever receive from Him.

Through the death that He would suffer over the next few hours ahead of Him, He would accomplish so many, many things. Through His death, burial and

resurrection, He would forever, conquer and defeat sin and death, both for Himself and for each one of us who have given our hearts to Him.

That sentence of death that God had pronounced upon Adam and Eve should they decide to eat of that "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil", would here be satisfied and fulfilled by His "propitiation".

And I know, without doubt that that purpose was the purpose that filled His thoughts as He stumbled His way down that cobbled street to His death.

Pause with me and let's consider together what thoughts might have been in His mind during those moments. But also, what would have been the thoughts that would have filled our own minds were we to be facing a similar moment of our own death. Listen to these words given in Luke chapter 23, verse 27,

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?" (Luke 23:27-31)

Oh my dear friends, what will be your thoughts . . . what will be my thoughts when it comes our turn to take our "last few steps" in this life? Will our thoughts be for our own selves, for the suffering that might still lie ahead of us as we make that dreaded transition from life to death?

And especially, will our thoughts be about the unknown course of events and possibilities that will lie just beyond that fear-filled moment when we will breathe our last and then step into the mysterious eternity of God?

What will be our thoughts?

As Jesus stumbled along the "Via Delarosa", the "way of sorrows" that led up to Mount Calvary, He knew that these steps would be the last few that He would take in this life.

Yes, He did know that He would rise again and that He would walk among some of these same people in just the next three days. But He also knew that then, everything would be very different, that though He would still minister in some ways to a few, the journey that He had begun thirty-three years ago, with all of its plans and purposes and intentions was quickly drawing to a close. His course was complete, He had finished His race.

And no, it will not be possible for us to truly imagine His thoughts, because while yes, in His humanity He was very much like us, but the God side of Him was far too mysterious for us to know about.

He knew things and felt things that our humanity is incapable of perceiving. And both of His sides, His human side and His God side were both always at work in His being. And no theologian or bible scholar has ever been able to plumb the depths of such high and holy knowledge, or to even imagine where those two boundaries began and ended.

But, with that being said, God has created you and me with the ability to imagine and to wonder. And while we should not take our imaginations too far, it seems good at times that we should use them, and I do.

Here, as Jesus was being harshly shuffled along His way by the impatient soldiers, His eyes were meeting with some of those who were lined along the roadway.

Was He, in those moments, perhaps wondering if He had done all that He could have done, and perhaps lamenting the many things that still remained undone.

Or was the God side of Him more in control and was He satisfied with all that He had done and especially satisfied about the things He was about to do over the next few short hours as He would suffer and die there on the cross, paying the debt for all the sins of the world.

Here, with these few words, Jesus opened a brief doorway for us to see just inside some of His final thoughts, and into realms where we would not have otherwise been able to go.

First, may we say that His thoughts were ever and always for others and never for Himself. Some might argue and ask, "But what about His struggles back there in the Garden of Gethsemane where He asked God the Father to let this awful

cup of wrath pass from Him?" And we know also, that yet to come as He hung there on the cross, He would cry out "Father why have you forsaken me."

And those words do sound very much like He was pleading for Himself. And many bible scholars attribute those cries as coming from His "human side" and therefore understandable.

But I am confident that when we look at the totality of who Jesus was and what He came to accomplish, we will find that in His complete obedience to God the Father, everything that He did, He did for others.

So then, may I simply say that as for me, I choose to believe that even in His seemingly worst times of struggle and apparent self-concern, it was probably not really as it seems to us. But rather, His struggles had much more to do with the need within Him to keep and to maintain and to demonstrate holiness and to never dishonor the righteousness of God.

And here, as He struggled through His final steps of life, we see that some of His thoughts and concerns were obviously for the "weaker ones", the women and the children. From the cross, He would give special instructions to John to be sure to take care of His mother Mary.

Also, as the true and loving Bridegroom Jesus is ever-concerned for His Bride, here speaking about the weaknesses of the "Daughters of Jerusalem", and of all women.

And He would later give more instructions through the Apostle Peter about the needful care for his bride. There in 1 Peter 3:7 He said,

⁷ Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. (1 Peter 3:7)

Women of today seem to resent being thought of as the "weaker partner". And I don't profess to know what those "weaknesses" spoken about here might be, but whatever they are, the husband must be ever-mindful of them and be willing to step forward and bless and protect his bride.

That was the reason that Jesus came to the earth. And that was the reason He was taking these last few steps up the hill toward Calvary. Jesus was accomplishing the last loving protection that His Bride, you and me, would need. He was providing eternal salvation for our weak and sinful souls.

And here, His concerns were also for the children, innocent ones who would not have any understanding of their dilemma.

Those were His thoughts as He stumbled along His chosen pathway toward His death! They were thoughts of love and of concern for the wellbeing of His bride and her children in the coming days ahead, because He truly knew what lay ahead for each of them, the deeply difficult and painful suffering they would surely endure.

Here, Bible Scholars believe that among other things, Jesus was giving special warning about the turmoil and the suffering that was to take place during the destruction of Jerusalem in the later years to follow as the Romans crushed the revolt by Jewish zealots and others. History records those days as being as awful as anyone could imagine, and were exactly as Jesus was describing here in His words.

And this was not the first time that He had spoken about such times of trouble. In His last year or so, Jesus had spoken often about the coming days of suffering. We see those warnings especially in the Book of Matthew, chapter 24, where He gave stern warnings about the sufferings to come.

And just as in most all prophecy, His warnings were not just for one event and one period in time. We can see from history that such events have a way of repeating themselves.

Here, Jesus was giving warning not only about the misery that the Romans would bring upon the people of Jerusalem in the revolt that would take place in 70 AD. He was also giving warning about an even more difficult time of suffering that is still to take place in the years that lie ahead for you and me, those days spoken about in the Book of Revelation called "the tribulation" and "the end times".

Listen again to Jesus as He stumbled along and then paused for a moment to speak to these women. Luke 23:27-31

²⁷ And a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him. ²⁸ But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For indeed the days are coming in which they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, wombs that never bore, and breasts which 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 in the green wood, what will be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:27-31)

When we began this study today, we asked the question, "What will be our thoughts, yours and mine, as we ourselves take our last few steps of this life?" And may I assure us that those days will surely come to each of us.

For some of us, it might be in the tribulation of the "last days". But for most of us, it will likely be one of the more common forms of dying. But whatever the circumstance, what will be our response to it.

Over these recent few years, I have had the privilege, and the sorrow of seeing some of my dearest friends and family members go through their last few days of life. And as I did that, each time I wondered just how I will react during my own coming "last days".

I recall when my dear son passed away from a liver disease. He suffered for several months and then endured some very serious suffering during his very last days there in the hospital.

We had several talks during those final days. He wanted to make sure that his children were cared for, and we assured him of that.

He also told us of how he was not afraid of dying and gave us assurance that he was confident of his eternity with the Lord.

And then, as he slipped into that state of unconsciousness where he was kept alive only by the power of the machinery, our broken hearts were simply left to wonder what might be taking place within his mind and soul. And then he breathed his last.

It was the most painful experience that his mother and I have ever and would ever endure.

But such is the way with our lives and with our death. For some of us it will be sudden and unforeseen. For others, it might be a long illness. But as the words of Hebrews 9:27 remind us, there surely is a certain appointed time for each of us to die. And yes, we will surely meet that appointed time.

And this presents another part of the question that we are considering here today. What should we be doing today and every other day, especially knowing that the event of our death might come suddenly and without warning?

Our Lord Jesus gives us the answer to that question. We should do exactly as He did! He lived every one of His days just as if it were His last, being about the plans and the purposes for which God had called Him to be about on this earth.

With that being true, how would that translate on to you and me. How should that be “fleshed out” within the remaining days of your and my lives, living as if each day might be our last?”

Should we make up a list of things that we want to do before we die? Many people do exactly that.

While I don't personally have such a list, it might not be a bad thing to do. But it occurs to me that I should be very careful about the things I choose to put on that list. Especially considering that the moment I breathe my last, I will be standing before my Lord in judgment giving an account of all the things that I have done. That warning given in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 10,

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. (1 Corinthians 5:10)

So then, for myself, if I were to make that kind of list, I would want my list of things to be things that are especially honoring to the Lord, and not just things of “self” and personal pleasure.

But surely things about witnessing to others and about making disciples. And also about many of the more basic things of life, about family and about friendships, and especially about our neighbors. Why? Because Jesus said that

those are the things that He will talk to me about when I stand before Him there in heaven.

Listen to these special words from Him that are given in Matthew chapter 25. There, Jesus, in speaking about that time said,

³⁴ Then the King (that's Jesus) will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? ³⁸ When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? ³⁹ Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' (Matthew 25:34-40)

And then in verse 45, Jesus went on to give the warning that on the occasions that we did not do these kind and generous things for other people, it would be like refusing to do it for Him. And that would be very wrong, deserving of a strong recompense.

Returning our thoughts back to those moments as Jesus stumbled through the streets on His way to the cross. As He was taking those last steps, and as he spoke these words to these women of Jerusalem, we know that though He might have wanted to do so much, much more, He knew that He truly had accomplished everything that He had come to do, and now He must take the last steps of His race.

He had come to seek and to save those who are lost. And in His life, and in His soon coming death and resurrection, He would finish all that He had come to do.

But notice, even to the very last moments of life, He was still greatly concerned for these ones He had come to seek and to save and to protect. His heart was ever and always concerned for the welfare of His people.

Again, may I ask . . . in your last moments of life, what will your thoughts be about? Will you be so caught up trying desperately to cling to your last breath of this life that you can only think of ways to live one more moment?

May I suggest one possible remedy for such “last minute” struggles! While you and I still have some “healthy breath” left within us, why don’t we go ahead and get about doing those things we just spoke about.

Why not make a deliberate and intentional plan and effort to go about loving the Lord more, and especially telling others how they might receive His blessed salvation. And then, why don’t we make intentional efforts to love our families and our neighbors more.

Then, as we lie there, perhaps helpless to do anything more to extend our life, we will be so satisfied with the things that we have already done that we won’t be so desperately wanting any further moments of this life. Perhaps we will then be so looking forward to heaven that we will just “slip away” into the arms of Christ with great and eternal joy. Doesn’t that sound wonderful?

Listen, as we close! In John chapter 14 Jesus said,

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (John 14:27)

And in Matthew chapter 11 He said,

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

Pray with me.