

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

March 4, 2012

May God Bless Your Marriage

No. 3609

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear radio friends,

At one time or another in your life, you will participate in a wedding. Maybe you will be the groom or the bride. Or maybe you will be the best man or the maid of honor. Maybe you will get to stand up as groomsman or bridesmaid. Or maybe you will be invited as a guest. Or perhaps you will even officiate at the wedding. A wedding is usually a very joyful occasion. There is an air of celebration, and there are many well-wishers and congratulations.

Today we are going to look at Ruth 4:11, 12. It is one of the closest things that you will find in the Bible to a description of a wedding ceremony.

There are other marriages and wedding celebrations mentioned in the Bible, but this one, perhaps more than any of the others, gives us instruction on what marriage is, on how marriage should be celebrated, and on what we should pray for for the new couple as we give them our congratulations.

These verses follow on the interaction between Boaz and the nearer kinsman of Ruth concerning the redemption of some of Naomi's land and the obligation he had to marry Ruth. The man whose responsibility this was as the nearest relative refused to do it. So Boaz has expressed his commitment to buy the land and to marry Ruth and to raise up the family of the deceased Elimelech.

Now, after Boaz expresses his commitment, we read this in Ruth 4:11, 12: "And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: and let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman."

The first thing that we take note of in these verses is the witnesses. Who were they and what function did they have in this wedding? They were, first of all, the elders of the town of Bethlehem, then also other friends and family that had gathered. Boaz was a well-known man. So, if you knew him and were passing by the gate of the city during this interaction, you would stop and participate. Similarly if we were to have a wedding, that is who we would invite. There would be friends and family, people that you know, and officials—a minister—to perform the wedding.

What role did these witnesses play? They were there in part to rejoice on this joyful occasion, to wish the new couple well, and to support them with their prayers and encouragement. But this was not the main reason for their presence. Primarily they were there to confirm the marriage. They were witnesses to the establishing of the bond of marriage between Boaz and Ruth. They heard the vow that Boaz took towards his wife. And they would hold him responsible for that vow. That is what they mean when they say, “We are witnesses.”

You see, this was not simply a private affair between Boaz and Ruth or a family affair in the family of Naomi. It was a public, official matter, something transacted before the elders of the city, who were not simply church elders but also magistrates. Their authority was civil. This tells us something very important about marriage. The institution of marriage is an official union, established under law, with the approval of the civil authority. Marriage is not simply a private matter between a man and a woman who decide that they are meant for each other, and so they say that they are married. Nor is marriage simply a family matter. Neither is marriage even simply a church matter. No, marriage is civil. So, still today, in our society, to be officially married you must have a license from the civil authority.

Why do I make a point of this? It is because when we marry, there is another who is a witness to our marriages. And that is God. God has given the law of marriage and the administration of it to the civil authorities. So He works and He witnesses our marriages through the civil authority.

Understand, marriage is a creation ordinance. In the beginning God ordained marriage. He brought Adam and Eve together. He spoke the first wedding sermon. And that creation-act defines for us and for all of human history what marriage is. That is the point that Jesus makes in Matthew 19 when He is discussing whether divorce is permissible. He tells His disciples that the law of their day may permit it, but that does not make it permissible before God. For He says, “From the beginning it was not so,” and He quotes Genesis 2: “What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

When a man and woman are officially joined together in marriage before the magistrate, God is operating through that magistrate to join them in marriage. And this means, too, that even though the civil authorities have the right to join two in marriage, they do not have the right to define marriage any other way than God in the beginning defined it. Biblical marriage is the union of one man and one woman in a lifelong relationship before God. Nothing else may be considered marriage. Anything else breaks the law of God and is adultery.

In this passage, the marriage union of Boaz and Ruth is carefully and legally established. It is a solemn occasion. But though it is solemn, we should also see it as joyful. You see that in the joy of those who witness this marriage. And that moves our focus from the elders of Bethlehem to the other guests who were present.

What was their joy? Interestingly, it was not the beauty of the bride or the party-spirit of the moment. There was no fanfare in this wedding. In fact, it was quite different from how we would celebrate the wedding. Even the bride was absent. But the absence of the bride and the absence of the party-spirit help us to realize where the focus ought to be in a marriage. I am not

saying the bride should not be there or that we may not celebrate. But simply this: as we do those things at a wedding, we should not lose focus on the real reason that we have joy in marriage. What was the joy of these witnesses? There are three things.

First, they rejoiced in the work of God in bringing Boaz and Ruth together. Notice in these two verses that the Lord Jehovah is mentioned twice in connection with this wedding. When we have a wedding, we must celebrate the Lord's work. Just as He brought Adam and Eve together in the beginning, so today He brings to every man his wife and to every woman her husband. This is God's work. And if we celebrate it that way, we will take seriously marriage as well. We marry before the Lord.

Second, the joy of these witnesses was that a godly marriage was established here. The two people who were being married were both believers and they desired to serve the Lord together. When you have a wedding like that, then you have real reason for joy. Then you really have a relationship to be happy about. And, unless you have that, there really can be no joy in marriage. There is only one kind of person that you, as a believer, should marry and consider for marriage, and that is another believer. In I Corinthians 6 believers are told not to be unequally yoked or joined together with unbelievers. And that applies to marriage. In I Corinthians 7:39, where permission is given to the widow to marry again, it says, "She is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only *in the Lord*." That is the qualification for every believer who seeks a marriage partner. You must marry in the Lord, only in the Lord.

Now this does not mean that you just marry anyone who says he is a Christian. The Bible makes plain that there are many people who call themselves Christian who are not. So, as you date and look for a marriage partner, you will want to know the genuineness, the sincerity, of the confession of the other. You will want to determine that her confession is the same as yours. Young people, when you date you must talk about these things: where you will go to church; your desire for a family; how you will raise your children; what place spiritual things will have in your day-to-day life and in your relationship. You should pray together and work towards a unity in your faith *before* you are married. These are the things that must take priority in your relationship.

Too often people wait to talk about such things until after they are married. Rather than viewing love and a relationship between a man and a woman as a deliberate decision with someone who is of like mind to yourself, relationships and love are viewed as something you just fall into. And so, falling into love, you fall into marriage, and then you figure out all the details later. Well, in that kind of a marriage, there can be no real joy.

So, if you are not married, this is something you should pray about and wait on the Lord for. We should not get the idea that we could marry just anyone who might be willing. No, God brings a husband and a wife together. And we must pray, obey, and wait.

Then, third, these witnesses rejoice in the public demonstration of Boaz's love for and commitment to Ruth. That is his wedding vow. How do they know about Boaz's love for and commitment to Ruth? It is because it was something that he had declared openly. And that also should be true of our love for the spouse that God has given to us. It should be clear to others,

from your conversation, from the way that you talk about your spouse, that your best friend and the love of your life is the man or the woman that God has put at your side in marriage.

This is how God loves His bride, the church. He demonstrates His love towards her publicly in giving His Son. And His Son, who is the groom, shows His love by laying down His life for His bride. And that is a message that is put on display for the whole world to see. Jesus loves His bride.

Now, coming back to the text, we see that these people are not only witnesses at this wedding, but also well-wishers. These verses are their prayer for Boaz and Ruth. They tell us what we should pray with regard to marriage—our own marriages and the marriages of others. There are four things in their prayer in verses 11 and 12.

First, they pray for a fruitful marriage. They say, “The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel.” One of God’s purposes for marriage is children. By bearing children, a couple, and a woman especially, builds the house, the family of her husband. That is what the wives of Jacob did in giving him twelve sons who became the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. So, first, they pray for a fruitful marriage.

Then they pray for a prosperous marriage. In the King James translation we read this: “And do thou worthily,” that is, they are saying to Boaz, “May you gain strength and riches.” During the Old Testament, wealth was a sign of blessing on God’s people. Now we know that Boaz was already a wealthy man. So their prayer is that God will continue to give to Boaz and Ruth a blessed life in the promised land of Canaan.

Then, third, they pray for fame for the family of Boaz and Ruth in Ephratah and in Bethlehem. There is something very loving and selfless about that prayer. They were not jealous of Boaz and Ruth. Instead, they want people to talk about them. They want their family to leave a spiritual legacy in Israel. They want somebody to come in the family of Boaz and Ruth who will do something remarkable in the name of the Lord and for the Lord and be remembered for great spiritual achievement. This prayer was certainly answered. Think of the fame of the name of David and Solomon, and later, of the name of Jesus the Messiah, who is preached throughout all the earth.

Then, fourth, they pray for covenant blessing on the family of Boaz and Ruth. That is in verse 12. In this verse there is mention made of a man named Pharez, who was the son of Judah born from Tamar. Their prayer is that God will make the house of Boaz and Ruth like to the house of Pharez. Now, at first this reference is a bit confusing, especially if you know the story of the birth of Pharez. You can read about it in Genesis 38.

Basically, what happens there is this. There was a situation similar to the one here in the book of Ruth. Judah had three sons, and Tamar had married the oldest one who, for his sin, died. And she had no children. So she married his brother, the second oldest of Judah’s sons, who deliberately refused to raise up a family in his older brother’s name. So the Lord killed him as well. Then Judah says to Tamar, “I have a younger son. Why don’t you wait till he is grown

up and then he will marry you.” So she waits. Well, this young man grew up and he was not given to Tamar. After a while, Judah’s own wife died. So Tamar played the role of a prostitute along the road where Judah passed. And Judah went in unto her. She keeps a couple of his personal items. Soon after this, when Judah hears that she is pregnant, he wants her to be stoned to death. And she says, “But I am pregnant by the man who owns these belongings, this pot and this ring.” And that was Judah. So her life is spared. As it turned out, she was pregnant with twins, and the oldest of the two was Pharez.

Now, as I say, at first that is a bit confusing. Why this reference to Pharez? It is because Pharez becomes a father in the line of Jesus Christ. Everywhere in the Bible where you read the genealogies of Christ, you will find his name there. That shows us two things. First, I believe it shows the godliness of Pharez in contrast to his brothers. Though his mother played the prostitute, her concern was that the law of God be observed and that the family name of Judah be preserved. That tells us that she was a godly woman and she must have raised her sons to be godly men. And Pharez was one whose family was distinguished from the rest of Judah’s descendants. But also this shows us the covenant blessing of the Lord to this family, the family of Judah. Despite the mess that Judah had created, God remained faithful to His promise to bring Jesus, the promised Messiah. And when these people pray that Boaz’s house will be like that of Pharez, they are saying, “May God be faithful to you in your marriage and give you godly children in your generations,” and even this, “May God raise up from your seed the promised Savior.”

So, this is their prayer for Boaz and Ruth on their wedding day. “May God bless your marriage with fruitfulness, with prosperity, with fame, and may He be faithful to you in your generations.”

When we take it all together and put it in New Testament terms, we would say this to the couple getting married: “May God give you a name and a place among His people and may He be faithful to you so that your children after you are also godly.” That is what we should seek for our marriages and for the marriages of other believers and for the marriage of our children.

That prayer God answered for Boaz and Ruth, as we will see in the remainder of the chapter. He is faithful to His promises. He gives them a godly son. He gives them prosperity and fame in Israel. And when God gives to us godly children and a name and a place among His people, He is blessing our homes and marriages. We have much reason in that for which to give Him thanks.

As we finish today, I want to turn your attention to the bride, Ruth, and the blessing that came to her through this marriage. As you do that, think of the blessing that comes to the bride of Jesus Christ, to us His redeemed people.

For Ruth, there is first the blessing of receiving an identity. Before this, she is called the widow of Mahlon, and Ruth the Moabitess. Now she becomes the wife of Boaz, Mrs. Boaz, Boaz being a man of stature, of godliness, and of renown in Bethlehem.

Second, she gains a new standing. She is not anymore a stranger from Moab and a poor beggar who has to glean for food. She comes into the home of Boaz as his wife, where she is loved and cared for and provided for. And she becomes a partaker of all his wealth.

Third, think of the bright future that she has now as the wife of Boaz. What hope there is for her as she looks ahead. What a joy must have filled her heart on this happy wedding day.

And in those blessings that come to Ruth we have a glimpse into the change and the privilege that is ours in Jesus Christ. In Him we receive a new name. Through Him we receive a new standing with God. There are great riches and blessings in Christ Jesus that become ours. And there is a great hope for the people of God for the future.

What a wonderful Redeemer we have in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Father, bless our marriages and bless us in the joy of our salvation as the bride of Jesus Christ. Bless this Word to us that we have considered, that it may be a means of grace to us to strengthen us in our faith and to sanctify us in our walk. We pray this for Jesus' sake, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

March 11, 2012

A Blessed End to a Beautiful Book

No. 3610

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Today we come to our last message in the short but beautiful book of Ruth from the Old Testament. Just to show you how beautiful this book is, I want to begin by recapping some of the main themes of the book. The central theme of this book is the faithfulness of Jehovah to His promises, even when His people are unfaithful. The last word of this book is “David.” And that signifies that God has in mind the coming of the Savior—Jesus. God is remembering His promises.

Another theme is the providence of God. God’s sovereign control of all things for the good of those whom He loves runs through this book. From the big events like famines to small events like which field Ruth will glean in; to sinful deeds in the lives of Elimelech and Naomi to the provision of daily food for the poor—God is at work in all these things.

Still another important theme is that of the redeemer. In this book we see the Old Testament law of the kinsman/redeemer played out. This is intended to make us think ahead to Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who comes in our flesh and who has the resources to redeem us, who pays the price of redemption and brings His bride into a life of rich fellowship with Himself.

So, what a beautiful book.

Then, besides these theological themes, there are many practical applications for the Christian life from this book. In these four chapters we learn that in the afflictions of His people, God is faithful to them. We learn the importance of putting church and spiritual things before earthly goals. From the contrast of Ruth and Orpah we learn what true conversion is. From the warm reception that Bethlehem gives to Naomi and Ruth we learn about the communion of the saints. From the generosity of Boaz and the law of gleaning we learn to be sympathetic in giving to the poor. From the rich relation of Naomi and Ruth we learn about selfless love in our relationships. We learn from the godliness of Boaz and Ruth. There are lessons here about marriage, for the unmarried and for those who seek a marriage partner. And there are lessons on what a blessed marriage and family looks like.

So, as I say, this is a beautiful book, rich with instruction, with promise, and with example.

Today we come to the last verses of the book. I have entitled this message, “A Blessed End to a Beautiful Book.” I have done that because this book ends on a high note of blessing—God’s blessing in the gift of a child, God’s blessing to the family of Boaz and Ruth, God’s blessing to

Naomi, God's blessing to Old Testament Israel, and God's blessing to all His people in every age through the promise of the coming Messiah. A blessed end to a beautiful book.

Now you remember well how this book starts. God is chastening His people with famine. Then, when Elimelech and Naomi flee to Moab, He chastens their family with death and grief. In those things, though, God is being faithful, and He is bringing a blessing into their life that they cannot see in the midst of that chastening. That blessing is here in the last verses of Ruth 4.

Last week, in verses 11 and 12, we looked at a prayer for God's blessing on the marriage of Boaz and Ruth. Now that prayer is answered in verse 13. Boaz takes Ruth to be his wife and they have a child together. If you have your Bibles open, I want you to look at verse 13. Is that what it says? They have a child together? No, this is what it says, "when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception." That is the first blessing here. From God, the blessing of a child—the blessing of conception.

The Lord gave her conception. We should stop and think about those words. This is only the second time in the entire book of Ruth that it says that the Lord Himself did something. The other is in chapter 1:6 where He visited His people and gave them bread. So, what does this teach us? It teaches that the sovereign providence of God extends to what takes place in a woman's womb. That is easily forgotten today, even by Christians. In a day of science and family-planning and abortion, it can seem as though man is in control of what happens in the womb. But here we see that conception is not just a matter of biology, that pregnancy is never an unplanned mistake. But, rather, that the God who is the maker of the universe is also the creator and giver of life in the womb. And that means that we may not take away that life. To kill it is murder, a violation of God's law concerning life.

And for believers, this means that where God creates this life, where God gives a child to a believing couple, that child is a blessing. Sometimes what God gives to us is a surprise. Maybe He gives you twins. Or maybe He gives you a special-needs child. Or maybe, from your point of view, an unplanned pregnancy. Those things can be a surprise to us. But it is never a mistake. From God's point of view it is exactly as He planned it. So we should receive our children as a blessing. And we should view them that way, too. That is important as we raise what we think of as a difficult child: God has given us that child as a blessing, and we are privileged to be the instruments to raise this child. Psalm 127:3 says, "Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward."

That is because when God gives children to believers, God is remembering His covenant promises. In Genesis 17:7, before God gives Isaac to Abraham, God says to him: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." And when we turn to the New Testament, in Acts 2:39, we hear Peter preaching: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children." So, when God gives us children, there is a promise that comes with them that these are His and that He will save and gather His church from the children of believers. A child born to believers is an evidence of God's faithfulness. So, the birth of a child is worthy of celebration as a work of God.

This is what happens in Ruth. When Obed is born to Boaz and Ruth, in verse 14, we see that the women of Bethlehem celebrated with Naomi, the grandmother. And they said, “Blessed be the Lord.” The birth of a covenant child is an occasion, a time for celebration and thanksgiving to God.

Now all this raises another question. How are children a blessing? How do they become a blessing? That is answered here in Ruth 4: Children born to believers are a blessing to the family, a generational blessing. When we look at Ruth 4:14-17, we see that this new child becomes a blessing especially to his grandmother Naomi. In their celebrations, the women of Bethlehem speak not to the parents, Boaz and Ruth, but to Naomi. And they say to her: “Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman.” Although Boaz had married Ruth and become *her* kinsman/redeemer, they see him as Naomi’s kinsman, the one who is raising up the family of her deceased husband. And when they speak of the baby to Naomi, they say, “He shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age.”

Then, verse 16 records for us a beautiful domestic scene. “And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.” This indicates a closeness between Naomi and the new baby, Obed. From Naomi’s point of view, the child in her lap was an indication that God had not forgotten her. No one could bring back her dead husband and her two sons, but now she has a daughter, Ruth, that is better to her than seven sons. And now, through Ruth, a grandson to restore her name and place in Israel. God gave this child to her as her redeemer. Naomi’s grandson brings great blessing into her life.

When we think about the church as a community of God’s covenant people, we should see the same thing: the importance of our children and grandchildren for the future of God’s church. When we see this, then we will pray diligently for our children. And we will diligently bring them up in the fear of the Lord, teaching them and correcting them and being an example of godliness to them. God’s promise is that, in this way, He will save them, with us. And when we become old, they will be a blessing in our lives.

There are especially two psalms that speak of the family: Psalm 127 and Psalm 128. And both of them end on this note. In Psalm 127:5 we read: “Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them [that is, children]: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.” In other words, when your children grow and make a confession of faith with you, you will not stand alone in your opposition to the devil and the world. These children will stand with you. They will be a blessing. Then, in Psalm 128:5, 6 we read of God’s blessing on the God-fearing: “The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel.” In other words, God will raise up the church of tomorrow from the children of today. What a blessing when one gets to see and experience that as Naomi did here.

This is indeed a blessed end to a beautiful book.

The blessing is here also in the marriage of Boaz and Ruth. As we come to the end of the book, let us think of the blessing here for Ruth. Think of where she had come from. She was in Moab, serving the gods of the Moabites. She marries an Israelite there in Moab. And he dies.

She wants to go back to Judah with her mother-in-law. But Naomi turns her back and tells her, “there’s no hope for you in Judah. Your plight will be the same as mine—the plight of a poor widow.” And think of Ruth when she is first in Bethlehem—poor and gleaning among the servants of Boaz.

But how God has changed all this! In verse 13 we read, “And Boaz took Ruth.” That does not only mean that he took her home. But it means that he took her away from all her former life. She goes from rags to riches. She goes from being an empty widow to a married woman with security and rest in marriage. She goes from loneliness to the intimacy and friendship of marriage. She goes from barrenness to being a mother. And especially she is taken from her unbelief and from the gods of Moab to trust under the wings of the God of Israel. She is saved. And she is given a place and a name and property and a child in Israel—the church of God.

And as we read between the lines, we see in this not just the work of Boaz, but the work of Jehovah God. All through this book He has been working. He has brought Ruth into the church, into the fellowship of believers, into the line of Jesus Christ, through faith into Christ Himself. What a change! What a blessing for her!

Indeed, a blessed end to a beautiful book.

And then think of the blessings here for Boaz. The Bible tells us in Proverbs 18:22, “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord.” And in Proverbs 19:14, “A prudent wife is from the Lord.” What a blessing to Boaz to receive a wife like this from the Lord. She is everything that the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is. We think of Ruth gleaning from morning till night in order to bring home food for Naomi when they were poor. And it reminds us of Proverbs 31:15: “She riseth also while it is night and giveth meat to her household and a portion to her maidens.” We think of Ruth’s hard work ethic and it reminds us of Proverbs 31:27, “She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.” Or we think of the kindness and virtue of Ruth that become a point of conversation in Bethlehem, so that when Boaz meets her he has heard all about her already. And it makes us think of Proverbs 31:23, “Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.” And, later in the chapter, “in her mouth are the words of kindness.”

A woman like that is a true blessing from God. What a blessing for Boaz.

And what a blessed marriage and family life they must have had together. The Bible does not give us any details of this, but it does tell us of the godliness of Boaz and Ruth going into marriage, and of the godly character of their children and grandchildren and great grandchildren. When David, their great grandson, comes along, we are told that he is a man “after God’s own heart.” Where did that come from? It came from the faith and godliness of the generations before him—just as Timothy is praised for his sincere faith that came from his mother and grandmother and from the knowledge of Scripture that he had from his childhood (see II Tim. 1:5; 3:14, 15). God’s blessing is here on the family of Boaz and Ruth.

What a blessed end to a beautiful book!

Then, too, in the concluding verses of the book we see God's blessing through this family on the nation of Israel and on all His people in every age. God blesses His church through this family.

The last verses of this book list the genealogies of Obed and of the family of Judah. Obed, the son of Boaz, becomes the father of Jesse, who is the father of David. Those generations go all the way back to Pharez, the son of Judah.

When you read these genealogies in the Scriptures, what is the point? What value is there in them? The answer is that they show to us the faithfulness of God in remembering His covenant and the Messianic promises all through the Old Testament. You see that especially when there is sin involved in the lives of those whose names are given. God is faithful, despite the sin of His people. His salvation, and the coming of Christ, are not dependent on the work of man.

But here, in the end of Ruth, these genealogies are especially about the preservation of a name. Earlier in the chapter there is the man with no name, the kinsman who would not play the role of redeemer. Then, earlier yet in the book, you have Elimelech and Mahlon and Chilion whose names are lost because they die without children. Then you see Boaz, the redeemer, willing to raise up the name of his deceased relatives. We do not know who wrote the book of Ruth. But I like to think it was David or Solomon, who knew these stories and who realized the great faithfulness and grace of God in preserving the name of their family. In II Samuel 7:18 David says, "Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" Then he marvels that God has promised to preserve his sons on the throne forever, that is, that God has promised the eternal king, Jesus the Messiah, to come from his children. David was amazed at God's faithfulness to his family that was raised up from nothing.

The last word in this book is the name David. What an end and what a name! If you were a believing Israelite, that name meant so much because it spoke of Christ who was to come. And in that name only is the hope of God's people. In that name, the wonderful name of our Savior Jesus Christ, the One whose name is "Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace"—in that name is the salvation of all God's people. So there is blessing and promise here for all God's people in every age. God never forgets His promises but fulfills them.

The story of Ruth takes place during the time of the judges, when the nation and when Elimelech and Naomi are unfaithful to God. Despite that, from the mess that these people made, God raises up the seed in the line of Christ and with it brings blessing to His people.

And we see in this that salvation, our salvation too, is all the work of God's sovereign, undeserved grace. Apart from God's faithfulness, we too would be lost in our sin. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, God has remembered His promise and given His Son, has made us alive by His Word and saved us from sin, and has brought us into the light of the kingdom of His dear Son.

Praise be to Him forever.

Let us pray.

Lord, we give thanks for Thy faithfulness, Thy grace, and Thy sovereign power that have redeemed us and saved us from our sin. We are thankful that all through the Scriptures this message comes to us poor sinners. Lord, help us to appreciate it and to show it in lives of gratitude. We pray it for Jesus' sake, Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

March 18, 2012 Weep Not for Me, but for Yourselves

No. 3611 Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

We are in the time of the year leading up to Easter that is commonly called “Lent.” During this time Christians all over the world are remembering the suffering of Jesus Christ. In today’s message, I want to talk about the proper biblical way for Christians to remember the sufferings of Jesus. We will do that by looking at Jesus’ own words in Luke 23:28.

In Luke 23 we have a record of the events surrounding the death of Jesus. Jesus is being dragged around Jerusalem in chains from the high priest to Pilate to Herod and then back to Pilate. All of these authorities have trouble finding an excuse for his execution till finally Pilate, after insisting on His innocence, nevertheless condemns Him to death and hands Him over to the Jews.

Throughout His trial, Jesus is struck on the face, spat on, mocked, and beaten, with the result that, as He is led out to Golgotha to be crucified, physically He is too weak to carry the cross. On the way to Golgotha (or Calvary) He is led by a band of unfeeling Roman soldiers, men to whom the life of another is a trifle. The proud scribes and Pharisees and priests followed too, delighted that at last Jesus is now under their power, glad that the eloquent tongue that had exposed their hypocrisy will now be silenced by death.

Then, too, there was the angry mob following, mocking, shaking their heads, crying out: “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” And amongst all these there were some, a group of women identified in Luke 23:28 as the daughters of Jerusalem who were weeping or, as verse 27 puts it, they were bewailing and lamenting the soon to come death of Jesus.

Up until this time Jesus has been silent in all His suffering. These are the first words that He utters from the time of His trial before Pilate until now. He said nothing to His tormentors; He was silent as the mob cried out “Crucify Him”; He hid not His face from shame and spitting; He gave His back to those that smote Him. And through it all, He has been silent.

Now, He breaks that silence by turning to these weeping women in verse 28 and saying, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.”

Who were these women? Jesus calls them the “daughters of Jerusalem,” which indicates that they are women who have grown up and lived in the city of Jerusalem. These are not the honorable women of Galilee who were Jesus’ disciples and of whom we read later in the chapter (v. 49) that they also followed. No, these are women from Jerusalem who were not among

Jesus' regular group of disciples. His disciples were following afar off. These women are close. They can hear Jesus speak to them as He goes to the cross. Probably they crowd the sides of the road as the Roman soldiers lead Jesus out.

Of course these women knew Jesus. This is clear from the text in that they are weeping specifically for Jesus. There are two others led forth with Him to be crucified: the malefactors. These women do not weep for them, but for Jesus. We should notice that the text uses very strong language to describe their behavior. In verse 27 two words are used: bewail and lament. This repetition of idea is used for emphasis. They were not just mourning quietly. Not just shedding a few tears that could be wiped away. These women were weeping and howling, uncontrollably. The idea of the word "bewail" is that they were beating themselves. They are wailing and crying out loud. And this weeping, understand, was not just a show. No, there was a real and a genuine sympathy in this crying. They wept for Him. Jesus acknowledges this when He says, "Weep not *for* me." These women knew Christ. They had heard His teaching in the temple. They had seen Him healing the multitudes of sick. Perhaps some of them were even the personal beneficiaries of His miracles. And these women have now witnessed His trial. They have heard the false witnesses accusing Him. They have become incensed at them. They have seen Pilate's injustice in condemning Him and become even more angry. And now, this innocent man is being led off to be crucified. They can hardly believe it. He has done nothing to deserve this. And so they weep in sympathy for Him. They want Him to know that they feel for Him in His suffering, that they think this should not be happening to Him.

And Jesus turns and rebukes them for their weeping. His words are not just a gentle suggestion or reminder. He is not simply saying, "You shouldn't worry about me, I'll be OK." His words are a forceful rebuke for a wrong and sinful behavior. Jesus corrects their behavior. He says, "You are doing something that you ought not be doing. It is wrong for you to weep for me. Stop doing it now and don't do it ever again."

Now that might at first surprise us. These women are just trying to be nice. They are just trying to let Him know that they do not agree with the injustices that are committed against Him. They are just trying to send a message to the rest of the mob and to the men of the city that what they are doing is wrong. And we might ask, how can Jesus tell them to stop what they are doing? How can He be so insensitive to their sensitivity?

The answer to this is, first, that in saying this Jesus does not condemn expressions of emotion and certainly does not condemn sympathy and weeping with and for others in their suffering. Certainly not. We read concerning Jesus Himself, when He came to the grave of Lazarus, that Jesus wept. That is the shortest verse in the Bible, but it is packed with meaning, telling us that we have a Savior who, as He is described in Hebrews, is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Emotions themselves are not bad. We all ought to be more sympathetic towards the needy.

Jesus is not condemning weeping as such. He does not just say, "Weep not." But He rebukes their weeping because they weep for *Him*. "Weep not for *me*," He says. "Do not weep for me, do not even cry for me, do not shed a tear for me."

The problem with the weeping of these women is that they weep for *Jesus*. And they should not be doing that. The problem is that their weeping is motivated by emotions and personal disappointment. They like this man. He had done them good. And, perhaps, He could do them good again if His life were spared. He was gentle to them, gentle even now. This just did not seem right. But in this, something is missing. What is missing is that they do not understand who Jesus is and why He must suffer. This is what Jesus is saying, “Do not weep for me. Do not shed a tear for me, because as soon as you do, you have missed the significance of the cross and my suffering.” When your weeping is motivated by sympathy, by injustice, then you have missed the meaning of the cross and suffering of Christ. Jesus’ rebuke of these women must be understood in light of the suffering and the cross of Jesus Christ.

And what is the cross? It is His suffering for sin, and His suffering on behalf and in the place of His people. We could put Jesus’ word positively. This is what He is saying to these women: “When you see Me suffering for you, do not weep for Me, but weep for you, for yourself.” Why does He say that? There are two reasons.

First, because in the cross Jesus is doing exactly what He came to do. In John 10:17 Jesus tells us: “Therefore doth my Father love me.” Why? “Because I lay down my life for my sheep.” This pleases God the Father. The cross is His obedience to the Father’s will. This is why He came into the world. In John 12:27 you have that expressed as a question in Jesus’ mind. He says, “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Shall I say, Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Shall I ask God for sympathy? Am I looking for sympathy from Him? Shall I ask man for sympathy? Am I looking for sympathy in my suffering? No! No! No! I came for this.” Do not weep for Jesus in His suffering. He *came* to suffer.

Second, we must not weep, because in the cross Jesus is demonstrating His love for His people. You have that in John 10:11. He says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” And, again, in John 15:13, “Greater love hath no man than this; that a man lay down his life for his friends.” In His cross and suffering Jesus does not ask for or need our sympathy. The cross is not an opportunity for us to express our love to Him. The cross is the expression of His love for us, for undeserving sinners. Jesus does not want us to feel sorry for Him, but to believe on Him—to believe that He suffered for our sins; to believe the substitutionary death of the Savior. And so He says, “Weep not for me.” The cross is not a mistake. The cross is not something to weep about. Jesus *chose* the cross. Jesus came for the cross. Jesus prayed for the cross. Jesus’ love for us is in the cross. There is nothing to weep about with regard to Jesus’ suffering itself. And so, to the women and to us, Jesus says, “Weep not for me.”

But weep, yes, weep. Weep for yourselves and for your children. Stop weeping for Me and start weeping for yourselves and for your children.

Why is Jesus telling them to weep for themselves? In the following verses Jesus gives us the reasons. In verse 29: “Behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.” Now, why would someone say that? How can someone without children be happy and be called blessed? The

barren woman desires children. You notice that Jesus is speaking of something in the future—the days are coming, He says. What days? He describes those days in verse 30 as days when men will “begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.” Why would they say this?

Here Jesus is quoting from Hosea 10:8 from the Old Testament. If you go to the Hosea you see that he is speaking there of the destruction that would come on Israel in the Old Testament through their captivity. In Hosea 10:10 God says, “It is my desire that I should chastise them.” Why will they say to the mountains “fall on us” and to the hills “cover us”? Because God will come in chastisement and in judgment against them.

Why must the women weep for themselves and for their children? The answer: Because God is going to chastise them and their children. Jesus is speaking of the soon-coming destruction of Jerusalem under the Romans. That will be a horrible time, a time when the women who were childless would be considered blessed, because it would be so painful for the mothers to watch their young children suffer; a time when the suffering would be so great that men would cry out to the hills to cover them; a time when God’s judgment would come on Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans.

That is what Jesus means in verse 31 as well. “For if they do these thing,” He says, “in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” A green tree is a good tree, one that does not deserve to be cut down or burned. A dry tree is a dead one. Jesus is saying to the Jews: “If they [that is, the Romans] will put me [the green tree] to death innocently, then think what they will do to you who are not innocent. If God will use the Romans to do this to me, then think what God will use the Romans to do to you who have not believed.”

Now, why would God do this to the Jews? This takes us back to the weeping of the women. He would bring this desolation on them because they missed the cross of Christ and its significance. God will chastise them because their tears are not tears over sin but tears of sympathy. They are tears of unfulfilled dreams, tears because everyone else is crying. And God will do it because not only did they miss the cross, but they led their children down the same path. They have missed the cross, and they will go to hell for that. This is what the text is saying. Some people will suffer the judgment of God in hell while crying for Jesus. Just because they wept at the side of the cross does not mean that they are saved. We must not remember the suffering of Christ by weeping at the thought of His physical suffering.

Today you will see this kind of celebration of Lent. There are re-enactments of the crucifixion of Christ, pictures of a bloody Jesus on a cross, movies and films that are made of the suffering of Jesus—all intended to evoke an emotional response to the suffering of Christ, to make people feel pity for the suffering Savior, to think of His suffering on the cross as a tragedy and a mistake. He is beaten—what a tragedy. He is innocently condemned—what an injustice. And now look what they are doing to Him—leading Him away to crucify Him. How awful, people will say. And they will weep and wail.

But then you have missed it. You do not understand the cross. The suffering of Jesus was much more and was much deeper than meets the human eye. The suffering that man can see was

only what man could do to Jesus. And man could do none of that except Jesus Christ gave Himself up to this suffering. In His suffering at the hands of man Jesus is the sovereign Savior. He gave Himself to man only as a means to bring Himself under the full weight of the wrath of God against man's sins. The true suffering of Christ took place during the three hours of darkness on the cross when God poured out on Him His infinite wrath against sin, and when He cried out from the agonies of hell, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," and when He expressed what hell is in the words "I thirst." This is a suffering inexpressible, a suffering that God deliberately hid from man in the darkness of Calvary because Christ alone as the Son of God could bear it. And when we think of this as the true essence of the suffering of Christ, then we must not weep over Christ but see in it His love and our sin that made this suffering necessary. You see, the issue is not weeping. The issue is not how many tears you can shed at the side of the suffering Savior. But the issue is repentance.

That is how the cross is to be preached today, too. Jesus does not tell His disciples to get their acquaintances and neighbors together to stand around and watch His trial and crucifixion. That will not do it. But, rather, they must take the cross to the people in the preaching of the gospel. If you look at Acts 2 and Peter's sermon there, that is what you see. Peter does not dwell on the details of Christ's suffering. In fact, he says nothing of it except that it happened. How does he bring the message of the cross in that first Pentecost sermon? In verse 23 he says to the Jews: "Whom ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." And in verse 36, "Whom ye have crucified." There is the punch of the cross. The power of the cross—to bring salvation to sinners. Not in the blood and gore and graphic visual display of His suffering. Not remembering His physical suffering. But this: You are guilty! And you read in Acts 2 that the audience was "pricked in their hearts" by that word and they asked, "What must we do?" And here is the answer from Peter: "Repent." In Jesus' words: "Weep not for me, but for yourselves." Weep over your sins that nailed Him to the cross. I must weep because of my lust and evil thoughts; because of *my* covetousness and greed; because of *my* nasty and destructive words; because of *my* sinful self. That is why Jesus is suffering. Yes, there is an injustice. The injustice is this: that we are not on the cross and we deserve to be. The real issue is: Repentance. The real issue is: Preparing ourselves by weeping over our sins in repentance, preparing ourselves for the day of God's wrath.

The cross and suffering of Jesus Christ is necessary because God is a just God, and because sin must be punished. And, unless our tears are tears of repentance over our own sin that makes necessary the suffering of Christ, we do not understand or believe in Jesus, the suffering Savior.

When we look at the suffering Savior, we must see our own sinful depravity, the justice of God, and that Christ is the One who suffered in our place. We must trust in Him.

So Jesus says, "Weep not for me, but for yourselves."

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for the suffering Savior, for His willingness to go to the cross and to suffer the agonies and the torments of hell that our sins deserve. Help us to live in repentance over our sin and to trust in Him. Amen.

THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

March 25, 2012

Our Savior's Unique Suffering

No. 3612

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

Dear Radio Friends,

Today I am going to speak to you from Lamentations 1:12. Lamentations is a short book in the Old Testament, tucked in between the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. It was written by Jeremiah and is a kind of appendix to his prophecy. In the book of Jeremiah we learn about the coming destruction of Jerusalem, and Lamentations is the fulfillment of that prophecy. Jeremiah writes it from the point of view of an on-the-street reporter, someone who is in the middle of and is experiencing the destruction and suffering.

Jeremiah is known in the Bible as the weeping prophet. We see that especially in this book. Jerusalem has been destroyed and all her glory is gone. The temple of Solomon is a pile of rubble; the walls of the great city are broken down; and the people of the city are either dead, gone into captivity, or they wander around in the rubble looking for food.

From the midst of this pile of rubble, when no one seems to care or pay any attention, when the Jews do not see why this has happened to them, and when the other nations just pass by and shake their heads casually interested—in the midst of all this Jeremiah cries out in the words of our text: “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.”

The title of this message will be: “Our Savior's Unique Suffering,” because, even though Jeremiah is voicing here the sorrow of Jerusalem, this is a prophecy of the sorrow and suffering of Jesus Christ. To see that, we should first describe the suffering of Jerusalem.

In the first ten verses of this book Jeremiah tells the story of a princess who loses all her glory and becomes a bond-slave. That princess is the city of Jerusalem. Jeremiah is like a reporter, and after describing the fall of the princess he lets her speak. He gives her the microphone, and she puts a question to us: “Is it nothing to you? Look at me, tell me. Have you ever seen sorrow and suffering like mine?”

What was her sorrow? First, the sorrow of Jerusalem was a sorrow of amazement. In verse 1, astonished, Jeremiah exclaims: “How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!” He is saying, “How can it be that this city, Jerusalem,

the city of God, the envy of all the nations; how can it be that she has now become this pile of rubble?"

Second, it was a solitary sorrow. In verse 2: "among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies," so that in verse 19 she says: "I called for my lovers, but they deceived me: my priests and mine elders [mine own people] gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls." Jerusalem is like an orphan. No one pays attention to her. Others are concerned only about themselves.

Third, the sorrow of Jerusalem is a deserved sorrow. In verse 8: "Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed." This sorrow is the consequence of her sin. God is meting out to Jerusalem, to the people of Jerusalem, what they deserve.

Fourth, it was a reflective sorrow, a sorrow that causes Jerusalem to look back to a time of blessing. In verse 7: "Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old." Her sorrow causes her to think of how she took for granted the blessings of God in the past. And now she repents (v. 18): "The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment."

From the sorrow of Jerusalem we learn that sin always results in judgment. God is just. God will not be mocked. And, therefore, we should repent of our sin. We should not have a fatalistic view of human suffering—Oh, well, it just happens. But we should see the hand of God in it and repent, or, likewise, perish. Sorrow and suffering should lead us to God in repentance.

Now, as we hear Jerusalem expressing her sorrow, we should hear the voice of Christ, Christ speaking from the cross of His suffering.

There is a connection between Jerusalem and our Savior. In Jerusalem were all the Old Testament types and shadows, the sacrifices, the kings, the priests, the temple, and so on, all of these pointing ahead to Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself, when He comes, says: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again." He uses the name for the place of worship in Jerusalem to refer to Himself—the temple. That temple in Jerusalem represented God's presence, God's dwelling-place with His people. And when Jesus comes, He comes as the fulfillment of that. He is given the name "Immanuel," which means "God with us." So, when the temple and Jerusalem are destroyed by Babylon, this is a picture of the destruction, the death and suffering of Jesus Christ, at the hands of unbelievers.

Also, there are similarities between the suffering of Jerusalem and the suffering of our Savior. Jesus' suffering, too, was a suffering to cause amazement. At the cross the centurion exclaimed: "Truly, this man was the Son of God." And the question that it puts before us is this: How can it be that the eternal Son of God has come so low that He dies on the cross at the hands of men? Amazing!

Jesus' suffering was also a suffering in which He suffered alone—a solitary sorrow. While He suffers in Gethsemane, Jesus' disciples sleep. When He is arrested, they all forsake Him. He

goes to the cross all alone. And in the end, He is forsaken also of God in the deepest hour of His suffering.

And so there are similarities. But though there are these similarities, we should see that the suffering of Christ was altogether unique and different from any merely human suffering. When Jesus suffered He did not add His name to the list of all others who suffer. There is plenty of suffering in this world—the suffering of hunger, of war, of sickness, of death. We know suffering personally. We know the pain of suffering or we witness suffering. We read about it in the paper. But Jesus' suffering is altogether different from any human suffering. It is much more than any other sorrow.

The text points to that uniqueness in the words: “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me.” There is no sorrow like the sorrow of Christ. It is incomparable. In what ways? Let me suggest some things that make His suffering unique. Every one of these should make us stand in amazement at what Christ did. We should see His love in these things and respond in praise and prayer.

First, consider the dignity of the person who suffered. It is one thing when the common people suffer, but another when a king or a ruler is captured and overthrown and he suffers. The One who suffered on the cross was the Son of God.

Second, Christ's suffering was undeserved. In this respect His suffering is altogether different from all human suffering. As one of the malefactors crucified with Christ said to the other: “And we indeed suffer justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss.”

Third, the sorrow of Jesus was voluntary. He chose to enter into His suffering. Man is born into sorrow. This is our portion in this world. But Jesus chose to become a man and to place Himself under the suffering and the curse of mankind.

Fourth, the sorrow of Jesus was unique because He suffered in the place of others. Not only was He innocent, but those who are guilty stand by and they watch while He suffers in their place.

Fifth, the suffering of Jesus was unique because it was lifelong. Every moment of His earthly existence He carried the burden of the wrath of God. Every ache, every pain, every sorrow that He experienced was an expression of the wrath of God against Him.

Sixth, His suffering was a constant combination of every kind of grief. For us, while we suffer one thing, we can smile about another. We have pleasures and joys in the midst of our grief. But in the hour of His suffering, Christ knew only bitterness and agony and grief.

Is there any sorrow like to His sorrow? That is the question of the text. And the answer is: No. When the text says, this sorrow that is done unto me, literally it is the pain that is rolled upon me. We have a picture here of being crushed by an unbearable weight. Christ's sorrow was not just a physical sorrow, but a sorrow of soul, as He was cursed by and estranged from

God. He bore the unbearable weight of the wrath of God. No wonder He cries out: “Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.”

And this raises another question. Why? Why did Jesus have to suffer in a way altogether unique? Remember, I said this is a reflective sorrow, a sorrow that God sends on Jerusalem so that she will ask the question: Why? We should ask the question Why? What had Jesus done?

We need to go back to the text for our answer. Why did Jerusalem have to suffer this way? What had Jerusalem done? Why must her walls be broken down? Why are God’s people carried away into the captivity of Babylon? Verse 18 gives us the answer: “The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against” Him. Why? Because of sin. Why must Jesus suffer? Because of sin—your sin and my sin. All the greatness and the uniqueness of His suffering that sets it apart from all other suffering points us to the corresponding greatness of our sin. This burden of sin that God rolls unto Christ, that crushes Him, this matches His suffering and shows the great price that must be paid for our sin. The fierce anger of God in the text, the burning wrath of God that Christ experiences, is against sin, against our sin.

As we look at the suffering of the cross, we should think of the magnitude of our sin. The Bible has given us many ways to think about how great our sin is. There are sins that we commit against better knowledge, presumptuous sins, as well as sins that are secret, sins that are unknown to us. There are sins of commission, that is, sins where we directly break one of God’s commandments. But there are also sins of omission, sins where we fail to keep one of God’s commandments. There are all our actual sins. Then there is the sin that is ours because of our guilt in Adam and Eve, which also makes us worthy of God’s wrath. There are sins in our thoughts. There are sins in our words. There are sins in our daily activities. There are sins that we commit in our homes. There are sins that we commit in our churches. There are sins that we commit in the workplace. There is sin in our relationships. There are sins against the moral law of the Ten Commandments as well as sins in not following the exhortations and the many admonitions of Scripture. And always Scripture is telling us that we are sinners. So great is our sin that Christ’s suffering must be of this nature. It must be unique.

And that points us to one more thing—the one thing especially that sets apart the sorrow of Christ from all other sorrow—this, that His sorrow is an actual payment for sin. Yes, there is other suffering because of sin. The result of Adam and Eve’s sin is a curse on the creation and on all humanity. All human suffering is because of sin. Sometimes in this life we have to bear the results of our own sin. In hell men will suffer for their sin eternally. But here, Christ’s suffering is different, is unique, in this way, that His suffering is an actual payment for sin. When man suffers because of his sin, God has to measure out that suffering little by little. But Christ suffered the full weight of the wrath of God against sin in the cross. It was all poured out on Him at once. The text describes it as the “fierce anger” of God. In His suffering He appeased the fierce anger, the wrath of God. He turned God away from His anger. He satisfied the justice of God against the sins of His people. He made a full and a final payment for sin, so that God says, “I’m satisfied with that payment.” No other payment for sin is like that. The wicked will suffer in hell for their sins, yes. And God will be satisfied that they suffer in hell. But never will it be said “It is finished,” as Christ said at the end of His suffering on the cross.

And that is why Christ had to be God. It was because only God could be strong enough to bear such a burden for sin. That, too, is why He must suffer alone. His solitary suffering was necessary because no one else could pay for sin. No one else could help Him in the hour of God's fierce anger. In salvation, in appeasing the wrath of God, in justifying the sinner, in forgiveness, Christ does the work of salvation all by Himself. You do not satisfy God. Man cannot win God's favor by what He does. No, salvation is through Christ alone, through His suffering and His payment for sin. The suffering of Christ is unique, alone. The Son of God suffers in our flesh for sin.

How do you respond? How do *you* respond to the suffering of Christ? In the text, Jeremiah calls out for a response. "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see [that is, stop and consider]." How do you evaluate the suffering of Jerusalem? How do you evaluate the suffering of Christ? What does it mean to you? How do you respond to it? It is as though every one of us is paraded past the cross and asked, "What do you think of it?" We are told to stop and to look and to evaluate. The gospel of the cross and the suffering of Jesus Christ demands a response from man. How do you respond to the unique suffering of Christ?

Will you pass by? Will you stop and gawk for a while with a mild interest and then move on? Will you be one of those who mock the suffering Christ? Will you laugh at Him? Is it nothing to you? Are there other things that are far more important to you? Do you consider Him to be just another one who had to suffer—just another crucified criminal? You have business to do, you have other things that are more important? Is it nothing to you? Or will you recognize what is really going on at the cross?

Christ calls us to look on His suffering. What does it mean to you? Is it just something cold, something historical, something theological? Or do the truths of the suffering of Christ in Scripture strike you and get your attention and stir your soul to see your own sin?

Do we see the suffering of Christ for what it is? That it is unique because He suffers for sin? That the One who suffered is the Son of God who is worthy of our worship? That He suffered alone because there is no way that you, a sinner, can make yourself acceptable to God? How do *you* respond to the suffering of Christ?

What response does Christ demand? This: Repentance and faith. Repentance is confession of sin and turning to a new life of godliness, following as a disciple of Christ. Faith is trusting in Jesus alone and not trusting yourself for your righteousness and your acceptance with God. Here, in the suffering Savior, the unique Savior, is the only refuge for the sinner. Here is all our hope, our only hope: Jesus Christ.

Sinner, be emptied of yourself and believe in Jesus alone.

Let us pray.

Father, we thank Thee for Jesus Christ, who so willingly bore so much sorrow for us, who took on Himself the fierce anger of God against sin. Lord, let us not be apathetic toward His suffering but, in repentance over sin, trust in Him alone for all our forgiveness. Amen