

Trail of Tears

An Unspoken Sermon

By: B. K. Campbell

[Revelation 21:3-4] *Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look! God's dwelling is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will exist no longer; grief, crying, and pain will exist no longer, because the previous things have passed away. (Holman Christian Standard Bible)*

Most of us begin our lives with tears. The child is not taken from the womb without tears. A man's life is a perpetual happening of tears. For some men death is more full of tears than birth. We leave a trail of tears behind us throughout our lives. As children we enter the world with tears, paving the way for what will be a long trail of tears.

There are different kinds of tears,
Those of laughter and those of sorrow,
Those of anger and those of mourning.

Mourning the loved that we have lost through death causes us a great deal of tears. The gentle memories of the past stir emotions within us, the absence of a child, the long night alone because wife or husband has departed. So many of us cannot get past the reality of life, the cruel thorns that curse our brow with sweat, the injustice of murder and the treachery of rape. Crime is ever rampant in our cities, is the cause of tears.

I wish to tell my audience today that it is ok to cry, ok to have tears; there is nothing wrong with tears. Of course, there is something very wrong with tears of anger, or tears of frustration, none of these tears bring glory to God they are selfish tears. If we are cognizant, aware of the reality of life (which is full of irreparable happenings and choices) then we will have our share of tears.

The minister's tears are often good tears just so long as they are not shed for himself, but for others.

For much of us life has turned out to be a grave disappointment, a dark and consistent trail of tears. We often wonder about the presence of God in the midst of our tears. Does our good Father care about our tears? If he doesn't can we still call Him good? I think you will find by the end of our sermon that God cares very much about tears.

Children ask themselves if their parent's care about their tears, and the wounded child soon seeks his father's arms, longing for comfort and embrace. However, there are times when the father has need of his child's tears, there are times when tears mature us. That is, they do us good not harm.

Not all of us grew up in godly homes where parents would embrace us and dry our tears. Some of us were born into the world without the presence of a father, others without the caring presence of a mother, and then there are the cases where it would have been better for there not to have been a father or mother.

No matter how we started out our trail of tears, the important thing to know is that it has started and that it must end. Yet it cannot end for the man without Christ. The man without Christ cannot partake of the comforts of Christ. At last when the long night of humanity is over and the children gather around their Father's throne, then we will see the bright day where comfort emerges.

We are here now and cannot remove ourselves from the present to rewrite the past. What is present must be faced as reality, what is past must be remembered in memory, but let the past better direct us into the light of the future.

Does God care about our tears? A question many suffering souls are sure to utter under their quiet trembling breath.

I think our text is a good indication that He does. Not only does God care about our tears, but He often asks for our tears. Tears are often sweeter to the Father than many echoes of laughter that soon cause the child to forget his home. The wayward and distant prodigal rejoices in his emancipation, but is soon full of sorrow, eating the sop of pigs. We must then turn home. A merry heart is quick to take laughter for granted, but a heavy heart stays close to the comforts of home.

Perhaps, there are some of you that feel you have had more than enough tears; enough tears to fill two lifetimes, your eyes strain to produce one more drop that you may ease the misery of your broken heart. As far as I can tell, men do not naturally want tears (unless of course we mean tears of joy). No man has yet objected to his own happiness. In every age tears of sorrow are more common than tears of joy, but it will not always be this way.

King Solomon saw the tears of men as they labored under the hot sun... the lash of a whip against flesh...sweat that burns the eyes and drains the bodies fluid, all this for the oppressor. Most of us have our own oppressors, are troubled by the confusion of our minds, burdened by the weight of our sin and haunted by the reality of our failures.

[Ecclesiastes 4: 1-3] ***“Again, I observed all the acts of oppression being done under the sun. Look at the tears of those who are oppressed; they have no one to comfort them. Power is with those who oppress them; they have no one to comfort them.² So I admired the dead, who have already died, more than the living, who are still alive.³ But better than either of them is the one who has not yet existed, who has not seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.”***

Solomon cannot help us, because there is no transcendence in his view. Hope is not an option for the preacher of Ecclesiastes. Solomon loathes tears, and the tears he observes he is right to loath. The 'preacher' tells us, from his limited perspective, that death is better than tears. Life is so void of comfort for many men that it were better if they had not been. But we are, and pouting will not undo the lashing whip of our oppressor.

Tears must be had in this life and the man without tears is not involved in life. Situations in life call for tears and only a cold heart is void of tears. Barbarians shed no tears because they know nothing of tears.

But then again, we must never forget that life is not about what we want. Surely, if that was the case there would be no tears.

So what is life about if it is not about man and his desires?

Life is about the Will and Works of the Master. Man cries out that life is futile, painful and unfair, that death is a virtue and longevity a curse; but who is man to tamper with life? Who is man to shout that he knows better than God? Who is man to ask his Maker why?

God is not evil He is good; God is not responsible for evil, that is the product of man's action. If the Master says that we are responsible for sin then we are, not because man is the source of all things but because God has decreed that man is responsible for sin. I do not need any other reason beyond this, if the Master tells me that I am vile then that is what I am.

Life has always been about what God wants; man always tries to center life on what he wants. I am afraid that much of our problems arise from trying to fight off God's will for our lives. Sovereignty is only tyrannical when it is divorced from love; Providence is only dreadful when it is divorced from goodness. But God is not a tyrant nor is He a devil He is a kind Father full of love for His children. It is so easy to forget that Sovereignty is fused with love, that Providence is permeated with good.

We are small children, limited in all our capacity to understand, but the Master does not forget that we are of the dust; He remembers the fragile form of our frail frame. History is full of tears, full of wicked acts and painful loss. Each man sitting in my audience will probably have a whole list of aching memories that swell up from the depth of his heart. Emotion is only a bad thing when it is severed from reality, when it gets in the way of authentic God-centered worship.

If you will ask me, if it is wrong to cry when your child's crib has turned cold; I must say, if you are not willing to shed a tear at such loss as infant death then you are cold blooded, infected with the heart of a barbarian! No, you must often weep on and weep into the darkness of the night.

Any man who tries to minimize the sorrow of our satiation under the sun doesn't embrace reality, but invents some delusion of the mind by which he might escape reality. Do not flee from what is real; do not stop the moist fountains because you would make your heart bleed cold. God will have our tears, those of joy as well as those of sorrow.

Man desires to be free of tears and in this his desires are true. I do not think it is possible for a perfect man in a sinless world to shed a tear of pain. In our text we are told that a time is coming when “*previous things*” will “*pass away*.” What does our text mean by “*previous things*?” To get that information we must view its context:

“Every tear. Death will exist no longer. Grief, crying and pain.”

The Master knows our situation far better than we know our situation. That is, God is aware of the former things that fill the earth; that permeate life with disdain.

At the time our text is spoken it is looking back upon the present. We live in the former things (previous things), you and I cannot escape their clutch; at least not yet. Our text does not tell us that every tear must be the result of physical sickness or mental pain. No, the reasons for our tears are so many that we cannot exhaust them in our text. The general reason for tears is sin. In a perfect world a perfect man will not weep. We know this because our text speaks of the glories of what is coming, and what is coming is perfection.

Man is not able to dry his own tears only God can do that.

Man is not able to make God dry his tears only love can do that.

So darkness will never expel darkness only light can do that.

The joy of the Christian is that God is *willing* to wipe away each tear; even better, God has *promised* that He will wipe away each tear. God will never falter on that promise, and it is a sure light for the Christian’s soul. A promise can do much for a wounded child. A simple kiss, touch of the cheek and warm embrace ensure the child that he is not alone. Little ones are known to bury their face in their father’s arms and dry their tears. In this same way we are welcome to come to our Heavenly Father.

Let us exhaust our hearts in prayer.

Let us bow weeping before the Master.

We must learn that sorrow will be with us through the night,

But joy must return in the morning.

Bury your heart in the Master’s care.

Stand on each promise until it blossoms like a rose,

Welcomes your embrace- that its sweet fragrance might replenish your life.

Because our text is to be fulfilled in the future, when it speaks of “*the previous things*” or “*former things*” it speaks of the things that are now. Tears are a reality that is part of the present, but they do not have longevity, death is often considered to be master of life, but death has no sting in eternity. Grief rides ever close to our breast, but joy will soon replace it. Pain torments the body and fills life with sorrow, but pain will soon be crippled forever that it can cripple no more. When God makes a thing to pass away it does so forever. No man can undo what God has done.

The devil cannot pinch our hearts in eternity; tears will not flow in heaven as they flow on earth. The cold springs of sorrow must soon be dried up. For now, if we must weep, let us not forget that tears are temporal; let us not regret the privilege of life. We

will find strength to fly beyond these fountains of sorrow so long as we view life through unflinching eyes gazed at eternity.

We will leave a trail of tears on our way to heaven. The fool will do so to his own peril, and will find that tears of the present where minor droplets compared to the rivers that hell will unleash in eternity. Hell will never cease in her tears and many men must go there. But if there is still life and breath, do not defer to come to Christ, there is hope while you live.

Our lord often found occasion to weep; and when He wept He wept Holy tears, tears that pleased the Father. Christ didn't weep for that He was a sinner, but that men were lost, that men were dead in sin. Death is the natural outworking of sin and sorrow is the outworking of death. Pain must reign for a season; until that season is passed and the blossoms of salvation take bloom in eternity transcending death through the power of life. Such is the extent, power and glory of Christ's atonement for sin. He will leave behind none that He suffered to redeem!

A final word regarding our tears:

The Christian is not without hope in this life. Though men will suffer and tears must flow like swift streams in time, we must not consent to sorrow, but learn to trample it down under hope in the cross. Despair is a natural product of life and the atheist has it without remedy. For the Christian, sorrow is only one small sliver that must be plucked at the gates of eternity.

Though you will find occasion to cry, you must not lose sight of eternity.

Weep on if you are heavy, but do not weep without hope!
Weep on if you are afflicted, but do not think your affliction is in vain!
Weep on if you are mourning, but do not think that God ignores your tears!
Yes, weep if you must poor pilgrim, there is no shame in tears!

The promises of the beatitudes tell us that God is watching, they inform us that He cares.

[Matthew 5:3-4] 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Blessed are those who mourn, because they will be comforted.'

Cast your burden upon the Master; give Him all your care, for only He is sufficient to dry your endless fountains of sorrow.

In the end comfort does not come from the fact that tears will be no more, that pain is forgotten and death undone. Joy my friends, does not come from the absence of these miseries, even though this is good reason to rejoice, joy comes from dwelling with the Master, and God has told us that He shall be our God and we shall be his people.

When He dwells among us (or better yet we among Him) nothing vile shall stand in our presence, nothing that hurts or draws from those temporal fountains of sorrow, in Him we find the end to our long trail of tears. In Him we find the answer for all our tears.

Amen. ***B. K. Campbell***

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