

## Ninth Passion Sermon

# Ninth Passion Sermon

**Christ Led Away To Be Crucified.—Simon Bears the Cross After Him.—The Women Who Follow Bewail and Lament Him**

**Martin Luther, "Ninth Passion-Sermon," Matthias Loy, ed., *Dr. Martin Luther's House-Postil, or, Sermons on the Gospels for the Sundays and Principal Festivals of the Church Year. Volume 2. Two Volumes. Second Edition. (Columbus, Ohio; J. A. Schulze, 1884), pp. 180-195.***

### **Luke 23, 26-31.**

And as they led Him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus. And there followed Him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented Him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, 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. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

Simon's bearing the cross and the women's weeping occurred while Christ was being led from Pilate to the place of execution. Matthew, Mark and Luke alike make mention of Simon, a Cyrenian, to show, no doubt, that what is said of him was no accident, as it might seem, but so ordained by God for a special purpose, viz.: that at the very time when Christ should be led away to suffer, all Christians might have an example set, from which to learn how they should fare on earth, — that they must bear the cross after the Lord Jesus, like Simon here. This good and pious man, not knowing in what the Jews at Jerusalem were engaged, went into the city according to his need and opportunity, to attend to his business. And now, as the Lord and the two murderers were led toward him, and the Lord, on account of weakness, could carry no further the cross which had been placed on Him, and which, since a strong, full-grown man was to be nailed to it, must have been pretty heavy, the soldiers ran up to good, pious Simon and compelled him to take up the cross or tree, to

which Christ was to be nailed, and to bear it after the Lord.

This looks as if it had happened incidentally. But it is, as already said, a picture of all Christians, which God wished to show to His Church just when His dear Son, Jesus Christ, was Himself suffering, so as to check that common offence which is so apt to lead us all astray. For as soon as God comes to us with the cross, attacking our body or property, giving us ill-bred children or sending some other misfortune or calamity, our courage fails us. We then conclude that God does not wish us well, and that if He loved us He would deal more gently with us. "We take the fact that He permits us to be troubled, afflicted and tormented as an indication that He is angry with us and refuses to be gracious.

Now, the picture in our text is to operate against offences of this kind. In the first place, we see the Son of God bearing His cross Himself and finding it so heavy that it nearly throws Him down and that He can scarcely walk. Mark this

## Ninth Passion Sermon

well! For if such things happen to the green and fruitful tree, about which we shall soon be told, it is easy to infer that better things shall not and can not happen the dry and unfruitful tree. In the second place, we see pious Simon doing the work that others should have done; had he not come near where Christ was compelled to carry His cross, he would never have needed to bear a cross. But here he suffers for the Lord Jesus; because Christ carries the cross, he also must suffer and help to carry it. Remember, it shall never be different with Christians here; they must all submit with Simon and bear the cross after Christ.

Although God may bear with the wicked for a while and permit them to receive everything that their hearts wish and covet, still their punishment shall not be delayed always. They too must suffer here on earth, receiving now here a kick then there a thrust, and never afterward enjoying uninterrupted success, as the 32. Psalm tells us: "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about," and as is glaringly shown by examples.

Severe and violent were the sufferings of ungodly Pharaoh and his Egyptians. And how much misfortune, oppression and grief did not the Jews have to bear in the desert and afterward in the land of Canaan, until, finally, the Assyrian wasted the ten tribes, and, some time after, even Judah's tribe was flung into the whirlpool of woes and the entire land conquered by the Babylonians! But it is not necessary to cite many instances. Each one need merely think of what he himself has seen and experienced in his own case and in that of others. It is, therefore, impossible that punishment, distress, wretchedness and tribulation should finally fail to follow where God is not feared and where His Word and will are resisted.

But from the case of Simon here we must learn to make a difference between the holy cross and the well-deserved punishment and misery of the wicked. No wonder if the knave fares badly; for he rushes to his doom with open eyes. If the

thief would stop his stealing he would, no doubt, remain secure against the gallows and the hangman. As for men and women, if they would refrain from debauchery, they might enjoy wealth, honor and health. But since they do not desist, but continue in sin, God punishes them with poverty, disgrace, disease, or other misfortunes. These wicked ones wish nothing else and nothing better; for, by their sin and impenitent lives they themselves furnish the cause for their misery and distress; they urge God, who would delight in being merciful and in giving them all good things, yea, they compel Him to make His anger burn at once, to heap destruction on them and to stem the tide of sin. Peter therefore says, 1 Pet. 4, 15: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters." He thus makes this distinction, that not all suffering is to be called a "cross;" for that which the wicked suffer is not their cross, but their punishment and merited reward; while that which Christians suffer, like Simon here, is called and is in reality a "cross," because it is not merited, but the fault of others. If Simon had not just happened to meet the Lord Jesus, he would have been let alone; but he has to suffer for it that he came where Christ was being led to the crucifixion.

In this way all Christians should suffer and bear the cross; even as Peter says: Not "suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, . . . yet . . . as a Christian," that is, for the sake of the Lord Jesus and His Word and confession. All Christians acknowledge themselves to be poor sinners, and know that through sin they have deserved all the calamities God sends upon them on earth, and many more. They are, indeed, the only ones who acknowledge their short-comings, weakness and transgressions; for sin's peculiar punishment is eternal death, and not this or that particular temporal misfortune. Nevertheless, their suffering is not the punishment for sin, but the real and holy "cross." His being a sinner and his stumbling and falling occasionally, is not the reason why the Christian is hated by the

## Ninth Passion Sermon

evil adversary and the world. No, both the devil and the world could well tolerate that, and would be satisfied with the Christian as far as that is concerned. But the Christian holds to the Word and has faith; he put his hope in Christ, the Son of God, and is comforted in His death and resurrection; he fears God and tries to live according to His will; he labors hard, by means of his confession, to persuade others to believe and to come to the knowledge of Christ. This it is that neither the devil nor his tender bride, the world, can endure; this it is that makes Satan rage so terribly against all Christians; this it is that makes him always pursue them, afflicting their bodies with disease and sometimes their property with loss by storms, or hail, or fire, as it was the case with Job. (Job 1.) And sometimes he troubles them with great secret torments of conscience, such as melancholy, sadness, fear, trembling, doubts, dread of death, and like fiery darts of the devil, about which the Psalms lament so much. Of this kind was the temptation of Paul which he mentions 2 Cor. 12: "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me," &c. And what the world does in this direction is easily seen, especially in times like the present, when poor Christians receive such wretched and horrible treatment.

This is bearing the Lord Jesus' cross as Simon did. Simon was certainly also a poor sinner, but what is that to these soldiers? It is not for this that they make him suffer, but they make him suffer because Christ, who cannot get along with His cross, is present and needs some one to help Him bear the cross.

Therefore, although thou art a poor sinner, and confessest how thou hast in various ways sinned against God; still, because thou believest in Christ, thy sins are not the chief cause of all thy crosses and afflictions, and thy sins are not that for which the devil and the world punish thee. Nay, it would be their joy and rejoicing if thou wouldst be altogether on their side, and not on that of God and His Word. It is chiefly on account

of the Lord Jesus, His Word and thy faith that thou must suffer.

This, that Simon bears the Lord Jesus' cross, is the first thing to be learned here. It is profitable especially for consolation, giving us certainty that we shall realize our hope of help and salvation, and provoking us to prayer. For he who, when he lies under the cross and in misery, thinks only of his being a sinner and deserving such punishment, is, by such thoughts, made too cold and too lazy to pray. For it is the nature of sin always to terrify the heart, to make it fearful and timid, and to deprive it of the consolation and the hope that God will bestow aught that is good. But if we consider the real, chief reason why the devil and the world are such bitter enemies of ours and heap all manner of mischief on us, we shall have to confess that it is not on account of our sins that they are so furious. They would like, and this is their constant aim, to plunge us into all sin and shame, to succeed in which would be their pleasure and satisfaction. They are opposed to us, they seek where they can to do us harm and hate us, especially because we heed the Word of God, confess the Lord Jesus, place our confidence in the goodness and grace of God and desire to live according to His will, in His fear and love, and in faith and obedience. This is the fountain and foundation of their hatred and envy. Mark well, thou must therefore not deny that thou art a poor sinner, and that thou hast by thy sins deserved every calamity. For God punishes also His own for their sins, as Peter says, "Judgment must begin at the house of God." But Satan and the world, so say to thyself, are not angry with me on this account; they would be satisfied with me if I, like a hog in the mire, remained impenitent in my sins. But why, then, do they hate me? Simply because I believe and confess that the Man who here bears the cross is my God and Saviour.

Now, if this is true, what shall we do next? Shall we despair? No, as you prize your soul, no! Firm hope must be ours. And though we are miserable sinners, it is still most sure that the

## Ninth Passion Sermon

Lord Jesus will not let us perish as long as we suffer for His sake. He can help us mercifully, and He will do so. And as we suffer and die with Him, so shall we also be exalted with Him into glory and live with Him forever. But let us boldly open our mouth and cry, saying: O Lord, we are, indeed, poor sinners, and by our disobedience have deserved infinitely severer chastisement than we are now bearing; but look, O Lord, at the wicked enemy's intentions. The enemy hates Thee and Thy name, and hates us too because we hold fast to Thee and Thy name, find comfort in Thy Word, and hope for mercy through Thy death and merits. Therefore, dear Lord Jesus Christ, be Thou avenged on them, and help us for Thy name's sake. — Such thoughts make the heart cheerful and give it confidence and boldness to pour itself out in prayer. For this reason the holy Prophets also prayed in this way, constantly pleading the name of God, as David does in the 44. Psalm: "Yea, for Thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." Let the preceding, about Simon's being compelled by the soldiers to suffer for the sake of the Lord Jesus by bearing His cross, be said, then, for the special purpose of teaching the distinction between the Christian's cross and the wicked man's punishment for sin.

The second thing to be learned here is that Simon not only bears the cross, but also bears it because he is compelled to do so. For if he would have had his own will in the matter, he would have gone his way and cared very little what was becoming of Christ and His cross. But the soldiers seize him against his will, and compel him to carry the cross.

This subject teaches us also very nicely what really is and what is not a cross. [There are some] who are in earnest, lead an austere life and oppress themselves with the most difficult labor. But this is not the cross of Christ which Simon bears. Why? Because they have placed it on themselves from their own free choice and without the command of God. ... But the proverb, "what is

done from choice is done with ease," might be applied to such suffering; since it is self-imposed, and might be avoided, it cannot hurt very badly. But when one is compelled to bear the cross and does it reluctantly, then it becomes heavy and oppressive. It is this idea that Christ expresses when He says, John 21, to Peter: "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." Let Christians be ever so perfect, flesh and blood cannot help but shudder at, fear and shun the cross.

For this reason this man is called Simon or Simeon, which, in his language, means one who takes advice and obeys. For that is true obedience which, though it prefers to be exempt from this or that suffering, still yields to it willingly, following and letting itself be led, simply because it sees that God desires it so. All true Christians can be called by this name Simon. For although their flesh and blood would like to rest and be excused from pain, they still obey, heed the Word, are submissive to the will of God, and help the Lord Jesus bear His cross.

The third thing to be learned here is to distinguish between Simon and the Lord Jesus. Simon bears the cross after the Lord Jesus as far as the place of execution and then goes away; while Christ allows Himself to be nailed to the cross and dies on it. This is the true difference between the suffering of Christ and our suffering. Our suffering does not earn the forgiveness of sins. This is accomplished alone by the sufferings of our Lord Jesus. He alone is the true Sacrifice and Lamb of God which pays and atones for the sins of all the world and, for this reason, hangs upon the cross. But Simon merely carries the cross; that is, our bearing the cross does nothing more with the old Adam than molest him, and nothing more with sin than oppose it. But it is the work and merit of our Lord Jesus alone that forgives our sins.

## Ninth Passion Sermon

Thus, beloved, you perceive that this Simon is a pattern for all Christians, for they must bear the cross of the Lord Jesus; and that it is not, however, on account of this bearing that their sins are forgiven. The bearing of the cross serves to restrain the old Adam, lest he become too wild. But when the cross is to be the means of the forgiveness of sins, it will not do for Simon to bear it, but then Christ must hang and die on it. This is the reason why Simon is set free. By Christ's death we are set free from death and receive eternal life, as this is clearly pointed out in that part of our text which we are about to treat.

St. Luke tells us that as the Lord was led out of Jerusalem, some women followed, bewailing and lamenting Him. The Lord turned to them and told them not to weep for Him, but for themselves and for their children, because the time was coming when the woman without child would be called blessed, and when, as Hosea says, men would desire the mountains to fall upon and cover them. But the reason of such calamity and woe was, that since Christ, the green tree, was so badly treated, they, the dry and barren tree, would be treated still worse.

Although these things referred especially to the Jews of that day, they still show us how to make proper use of our Lord Jesus' sufferings; first, by revealing sin as a terrible burden, — the Son of God Himself being compelled to die on account of our sin; and then, by consoling us against sin by means of Christ's sufferings, — the Son of God having rendered satisfaction and atoned for sin upon the cross.

Notice, first, the difference which the Lord makes between Himself and the Jews, for on this difference a great deal depends. Himself He compares to a young tree, so beautiful and fruitful that it should be bought for a garden, and by no means cut down and cast into the fire. Nevertheless, the latter is done. God lets Him be cut down, that is, He lets Him now be led out to the cross, where He is to be slain as the greatest malefactor, notwith-

standing that He is such a fine, sappy, beautiful and fruitful tree. He is without all sin and walks before God in perfect obedience, and all things He says and does are purely noble and precious fruits, every one of which is a joy to God and a blessing to us. In short, we find nothing about the Lord Jesus that is not grace, life and salvation. The Jews on the other hand, He compares to an old, barren, dry and rotten tree, which is altogether out of place in the garden, and only fit to be felled and burned. For they did not heed God's Word. John's preaching brought no fruit; they said John had a devil. Christ, the Son of God, Himself and His Apostles preached. Neither did they pay any attention to Him, but called Him a wine-bibber, said He had a devil, and hated and envied Him so bitterly that they had no peace until they had brought Him from life to death. Nevertheless, since they had Moses, the law, and the external worship of God in the temple at Jerusalem, they dared to think that they were God's people, that they were living saints, indeed, and that they rested in God's bosom. Now, it is easy to imagine, if the Son of God, who is a fine, fruitful tree, is visited by so severe a judgment of God, how infinitely severe shall be the fate of the terribly great sinners, the dry trees. It was the Lord's desire that the Jews should understand this now and not continue in their sin; that, by seeing Him, who, though innocent, was crucified and killed, they might learn to fear the wrath of God and to flee from it by true repentance. Little, however, did this wanting avail. The dry tree could yield no fruit, and so was cast into the fire. History shows this, where it tells us that about forty years after Christ's death a most terrible judgment came upon the Jews for their sin, the Romans desolating their whole land. For themselves, therefore, even as the Lord here counsels and exhorts them to do, and not for Christ, should they have wept, acknowledging their sins and repenting.

We too, however, should take this advice to heart. For we all must confess that we have many and great sins and, therefore, are dry and

## Ninth Passion Sermon

unfruitful trees,—trees which do not and can not yield anything good. What, then, shall we do? Nothing except weep and cry to God for pardon, and earnestly resist and curb our evil, sinful nature and inordinate desires. For we are admonished here, that since the fruitful tree receives such shameful treatment, God permitting His dear Son to suffer so severely, we should not feel secure, nor laugh, nor skip carelessly along, like the world, which neither hears nor knows this warning of the Lord. But we should weep, we should discern our sins, we should heartily lament that we have been so corrupted by sin and that we have become unfruitful trees; we should fear the wrath of God on this account and pray for mercy and forgiveness.

The first thing for us specially to learn from the sufferings of Christ is to fear God and His anger on account of our sins, and not to give the reins to sin. This we must do for ourselves, for we are a dry, unfruitful tree, which is fit only for the fire.

But the Lord teaches us still another thing here. We should weep for ourselves and for our children; but for Him we should not weep, but laugh, rejoice and be of good cheer. For why does He suffer? He is a genuine, good and fruitful tree, and has not deserved such a cruel fate, but bears it for our sin's sake. And as He now proceeds to the cross it is His only aim to perform the work of His priestly office, and not only to pray for sinners, but also to sacrifice His body and His life upon the altar of the cross for them, so that this offering may reconcile God, liberate poor sinners from His wrath, and make them heirs of everlasting life. The Lord, therefore, does not want us to think of His sufferings as of something for which we should weep. He wants us to rejoice, to glorify God, to thank Him for His mercy, to praise, to extol and to confess Him, because His going to the cross has brought to us the grace of God, freed us from sin and death, and made us God's dear children.

But the first of these lessons goes down as hard with us as the second, and the second as hard as the first. We prefer the ways of the world to the warning and advice of the Lord Jesus. We should weep for ourselves, because sin has polluted us so, and because so terrible a judgment awaits us. But where is the man to be found who weeps? The deeper men sink into the slime of sin, the more secure and joyful they grow. Man deems his joy, glory and life perfect, as we have said several times before, when he has numerous occasions for sinning. No sum of money can satiate the miser's maw. The more advantage the greedy man can take and the freer access to gain he has, the happier he becomes, and he verily imagines that he has done his work well. Just so it is with other sins, such as anger, lewdness, envy, pride. Who cares for them? Who weeps for them? They are loved by every one and every one yields to them.

How the Jews succeeded with such work we clearly see. It behooves us, therefore, to repent and, as the Lord now so faithfully exhorts when He is about to die, to be concerned and grieved for ourselves. And it is certain, once for all, that our sins shall be punished with eternal death unless we are freed from them.

Even as we are disobedient with reference to the first lesson, for no one weeps and none lament their sins; so do we disobey in regard to the second, for no one wishes heartily to rejoice over the dear Lord Jesus. Money, possessions, honor and the like, mean and little though they be, rejoice the heart; while that which is exclusively grace and life and salvation finds the heart almost chilled and dead, and void of all longing and desire and heartfelt eagerness to possess this treasure.

These lessons, when attention is paid merely to their words, are, indeed, easily and quickly learned; but when, on the other hand, they are to be mastered in their relation to our heart and sinful nature, the task is most difficult and even impossible. Our determination to invert

### Ninth Passion Sermon

these lessons is hereditary. Instead of weeping for our sins, we laugh about them. Instead of laughing and exulting with all our heart that Christ has died for us, we weep. Now, we either regard this rejoicing on account of Jesus as not superior to the more popular joys of the world; or else sin and the wrath of God have seized our souls and banished from them the desire and the ability to be comforted. Christ's "Weep not for me" hardly penetrates the heart. We weep and lament and despair as though Christ had not died, not paid for our sins, not averted God's anger, and not delivered us from death.

Before either lesson can be learned, therefore, prayer is necessary. We must pray, first, that God, by His Holy Spirit, would move our hearts, disgust us with and dissuade us from sin, and shield us from false security. We must pray, again, that He would kindle in our souls the flame of consolation against sin, and seal there the confidence in the sacrifice and satisfaction of Christ Jesus; so that we may truly worship God, like poor sinners fear Him, abide in repentance and trust in His goodness with all our heart; for He does not wish us harm, seeing that for the forgiveness of our sins He delivered His Only Begotten into death, even the death of the cross. May our dear Lord Jesus grant us this. Amen.