

What Shall Occupy Our Minds During Lent?

Text: Luke 18:31-43

1) The Story of Lent

Suggested Hymns:

2) The Prayer of Lent

507, 59, 179, 292, 330

3) The Comfort of Lent

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 18:31-43, ³¹ *Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. ³² "For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. ³³ "They will scourge Him and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again." ³⁴ But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.*

³⁵ *Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. ³⁶ And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant. ³⁷ So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. ³⁸ And he cried out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ³⁹ Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

⁴⁰ *So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, ⁴¹ saying, "What do you want Me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." ⁴² Then Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." ⁴³ And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There is no more important topic in all the world than the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. In comparison with it, all other

knowledge and science is nothing. Here we find the climax of learning and wisdom. Here lie concealed all the boundless treasures of the wisdom of God.

It is for this reason that the Bible so often speaks of our Lord's suffering and death. Jesus Himself frequently spoke about it to His disciples. And the closer He came to the hour of His supreme sacrifice, the more urgent became His words.

Six days before His glorious transfiguration on the mountain, He showed His friends, as Matthew relates, *"that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."*¹

Luke tells us, *⁵¹ Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.*² And in the words before us today the same Evangelist brings us another of the prophecies of our Lord concerning His Passion.

It is therefore timely and appropriate that the Christian Church has selected this portion of St. Luke's Gospel as the Gospel for this Sunday. Today is the Sunday before Lent. This week we observe Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten season.

In order that these coming weeks may be to us a source of spiritual blessings, we shall do well to prepare ourselves for the Lenten season today. On the basis of today's Gospel, let us consider the question, *What Shall Occupy Our Minds During Lent?* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Story of Lent

Our text begins, *³¹ Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. ³² "For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. ³³ "They will scourge Him and kill Him.* Thus our Lord briefly summarises the story of His suffering and death. These words tell us what we should consider in the Lenten season. And as we turn our thoughts to these events, there are several things which we must realise.

A Wonderful Story

For one thing, we must realise that this truly wonderful story far exceeds our human reason. We are told concerning the disciples of Christ, ³⁴ ***But they understood none of these things; this saying was hidden from them, and they did not know the things which were spoken.***

To be sure, they were able to grasp the outward sense of the words. They knew that Jesus was speaking about His death. At His first announcement of it Peter had cried out, ***“Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!”***³

But these disciples failed to grasp the real meaning of these words of Christ. They had not yet understood the significance of their Master’s suffering, death, and resurrection. This was still beyond the grasp of their faith. They made the mistake of applying their reason to the understanding of the words of Jesus.

And just as little can we with the abilities of our natural mind grasp the wonderful story of our Lord’s suffering and death. It is all much too deep for us. We just cannot comprehend the fact that Christ through His death obtained real life, that by His apparent defeat He gained the victory over all His enemies, that the holy and just God was truly reconciled through the sacrifice of His own Son, that the almighty Lord of heaven and earth permitted Himself to be captured, and that the Prince of Life should suffer death.

Here we can only stand and gaze with awe and reverence. And so we must be careful that in our meditations on our Lord’s Passion we do not follow the inclinations of our own reason, lest we also find ourselves in the position of the disciples, who could not understand what it was all about. Instead, we must rely on the Word of the Saviour, ***all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished.***

We must accept the statements of the Scriptures as they stand. Only the Son of God can instruct us and give us the real truth concerning the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

God the Author of This Story

And as we consider the well-known words of the Lenten story, we must furthermore realise that all this was a part of the eternal plan of God. Not only did our Saviour foretell the events of the first Holy Week, but they had been the subject of prophecy for thousands of years.

Already in the Old Testament, God had revealed His eternal plans and resolutions. As the Apostle says in Acts 2:23, Christ was really *“delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God.”* From eternity God had mercy on sinners. That love of God which is so clearly displayed in the last days of our Saviour’s life is an eternal love. And that fact must impress itself upon our heart, particularly in the Lenten season.

Again, we must realise that our Saviour suffered and died of His own free will. He knew what lay before Him when He said to His friends, *“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem,”* and yet He went, because He was willing to suffer and die for sinful mankind.

Jesus was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and yet He suffered for sinners. His boundless love moved Him to endure indescribable torture and shameful death without shrinking. His omniscient eye saw clearly the capture, the mockery, the scourging, the crucifixion, and all the other tortures of Good Friday. But He loved us wretched sinners so deeply that He did not hesitate in the least.

And there is still another point that we must accept in our Lenten meditations, namely, that the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ really did accomplish their purpose. Our Lord prophesies here, *“And the third day He will rise again.”* That would be the proof of the sufficiency of His work.

What Jesus set out to do, He actually accomplished successfully. Otherwise He would not have risen from the dead. By His Passion our Saviour really did atone for the sins of all mankind, appease the wrath of God, and satisfy the demands of divine justice. Therefore His suffering and death have an eternal value.

That is what the Scriptures tell us about the story of Lent. And we must not think that it is something which we all know, something old and unattractive. We shall discover that as we again accompany our Lord on His last journey, these events will impress themselves deeply upon our hearts and will serve to build and strengthen our Christian faith. Here is the heart and center of Christianity. This must occupy our minds during the Lenten season.

2. The Prayer Of Lent

But we must also learn to pray with deeper devotion the prayer of Lent. Luke tells us, ³⁵ *Then it happened, as He was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging.* ³⁶ *And hearing a multitude passing by, he asked what it meant.* ³⁷ *So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.* ³⁸ *And he cried out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"* ³⁹ *Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"*

A Picture of Ourselves

This blind man, whom Mark calls Bartimaeus, had heard of Jesus of Nazareth. The miracles and sermons of Jesus were well known all over Palestine. This blind man was also well acquainted with the prophecies of the Old Testament, for he called Jesus "Son of David," a name used in the Old Testament to designate the Messiah. And now Bartimaeus hears that Jesus is passing by.

Let us pause here for just a moment. We also have heard of Jesus of Nazareth. As often as we come into contact with the Gospel, in each sermon, each reading of the Bible, each Christian prayer or hymn, we hear the announcement, *"The Saviour is here."* Again and again Jesus is near us and comes to us. And this is true especially in the Lenten season, when we are especially concerned with His redemptive work.

And now we see in this blind Bartimaeus a picture of a Christian whose heart is filled with the true attitude of Lent. Bartimaeus is blind and miserable, and he knows and realises his misery. And by nature we are all in an even worse condition.

Our tragedy is spiritual blindness, spiritual misery, the wretchedness of sin's corruption. That is something we must realise particularly during Lent. We must place before our eyes our own sinfulness, which was the real cause of our Saviour's suffering and death.

We must pray not only,⁴

*Make me see Thy great distress,
Anguish, and affliction,*

but also

*Show me not alone Thy pain,
Torment, and affliction;
Let me see the cause and gain
Of Thy crucifixion.
Ah, my sin caused all the woe
That Thou, Lord, hast suffered;*

And as Bartimaeus sincerely longed to be set free and delivered from his misery, so we also must long for healing and salvation and must pray, ***“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*** *I am a miserable wretch. I should be eternally damned. But You have borne my griefs and carried my sorrows and have gained forgiveness for me. To You alone I look for help and deliverance.*” That is the prayer of Lent.

Persistence in Prayer

But now we are also told in this Gospel, ³⁹ ***“Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”*** Also today there are many things which would silence our plea for mercy. At times our sins seem too great to be forgiven. Our conscience causes us no end of trouble. Doubts arise in our mind and try to separate us from our Saviour.

But as Bartimaeus insistently cried, ***“Have mercy on me,”*** so we also must continue and persist in our prayer for mercy. The sacrifice of Christ will cover even the greatest sin. Before His merit and righteousness our conscience must be still. By sincere and devout meditation on His Word our doubts must vanish.

The suffering and death of Jesus Christ is the foundation of all our hope. To Him we must cling with the persistent plea, ***“Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”***

3. The Comfort Of Lent

And when we do that, we shall also experience the comfort of Lent. ⁴⁰ ***“So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, “What do you want Me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, that I may receive my sight.”*** ⁴² ***“Then Jesus said to him, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.”*** ⁴³ ***“And immediately he received his sight.”***

Christ's Answer to Our Prayer

Jesus did have mercy on this blind man, and He removed his misery. And so He still has mercy on us in the misery of our sin-fullness. He has done everything necessary for our redemption. No contrition, no penance, no good works, can or must complete His salvation. If we trust in Him alone and look for salvation neither in ourselves nor in any other creature, but consider His redemptive work as the only source of help for us, then we believe in Him, and then we shall also hear Him say to us, ***“Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.”***

Then our sins are truly forgiven. And then we have in God our loving Father, who will also help us in every need and trouble here on earth, just as the Lord healed the physical blindness of this man after He had previously granted him spiritual sight.

These, then, are the things that should occupy our minds during the Lenten season: The story of Lent, the prayer of Lent, and the comfort of Lent. For this purpose we shall mediate on this year's Lenten Devotions in our home devotions. Then this will be a blessed Lententide for us.

Serious and earnest as is the subject matter of Lent, it is also infinitely precious. This is a time of sober reflection, but it is also a time of quiet joy; and as the people in this Gospel praised and glorified God, so we also should raise our hearts to God in glad and joyful expressions of gratitude for our salvation.

May God bless this Lenten season upon us all and let it serve to increase and strengthen our faith in our Saviour! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 16:21

² Luke 9:51

³ Matthew 16:22

⁴ Hymn 59 v2