

The news came, the Holy city, the City of God, Jerusalem, was in ruins: *“When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days fasting and praying before the God of heaven” (Neh.1:4)*. The restoration had been completed. The walls had been rebuilt, centuries have passed and the city is now alive with people from around the world. It is in peace because of the might of Rome—a young rabbi and his followers make their way into the city with an impromptu parade and his followers shout and praise God. The text then reads: *“As he came near and saw the city he (Jesus) wept over it” (Luke 11:41)*.

Two men, centuries apart weep over the same city. Why?

Nehemiah is a Jew living in a foreign land. He, like Daniel before him, has risen to a position of power in the king’s household. Nehemiah is the wine steward of the king. His responsibility is to make sure that only the finest and safest wine is placed before the king. He knows the rules of the royal household. Today we might say, “He needs to keep a happy face.” He must be upbeat and happy but his days of mourning over the fate of Jerusalem cannot be hid. The king observes that something has changed, something is wrong. “Why are you so down?” “Have you been crying?” “What is wrong?” Nehemiah has no choice – he confides in the king the situation in Jerusalem. It is a defenseless city. Its walls are in ruins. Its people are in danger. How can I be happy when the city of my God is in ruins. Do you hear the echoes of the 137th Psalm?

*“By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and **there we wept when we remembered Zion**. On the willows there we hung our harps. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ How could we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?”*

Jesus has entered the city of Jerusalem amid joyous shouts of celebration and praise. Now this is a small group at best, among the thousands who are coming to the city to celebrate Passover. They are probably hardly noticed, a few more festive pilgrims coming to celebrate. There are too many arriving daily in Jerusalem to notice this one band of celebrating pilgrims. However, a few of the religious leaders in the group want silence. They do not want the boat to be rocked. What will the Romans say if they hear of a King coming into the city? They do not want to be embarrassed by such outbursts. They demand Jesus silence his followers. Jesus responds that should the crowd be silent – the stones will shout. The importance of this day is lost—Jesus is moved to tears, he wept over the city.

If they only know what was happening. If they only recognized who was coming into the city. Today is a day of peace, hope, forgiveness and triumph. Things could be so different, if they would only recognize the one entering his city. But, most failed to recognize and see and those who did, did not fully understand – God has entered the City of God. Jesus is moved to tears.

As we look further into these two passages we see two men weeping over Jerusalem for two different reasons. Nehemiah’s tears were because of the way things were. The city of God is in ruins. Its walls are in disrepair. The city is unsafe.

It is not protected from its enemies. The splendor of the past is gone and there is now only rubble. Nehemiah sees no hope for the city and its people until the walls are rebuilt and the gates restored. It has lost its prestige in the world. It is just another dying city. The glory of the past has been lost. The city is now a poor reflection of God and God's glory as seen through the eyes of Nehemiah.

As I read this I thought of my hometown and how things used to be. It was/is the county seat; it was where all the action happened. On Saturday nights (before television) the stores remained open, people came from outlying areas and the town square was filled with people. News was shared, friendships were renewed and stories told. Today the square is still there, only most of the buildings are gone or empty. There are no longer Saturday night gatherings. It has been renewed but it has lost most of its former glory.

Jesus' tears are not for what is but for what will be. If only they had recognized the events of this day? But they did not. His tears are:

For the hatred and destruction that is coming
For the city that will be destroyed, its splendor lost.
For his body soon to be broken, his blood to be shed.
For their failure to recognize the One who is in their midst.
For their failure to see God moving in a new direction.
For their failure to see God's new plan of redemption.
For their misrepresentation of the will of God.

Read the next few verses. Jesus is in the Temple, among the money changers, etc. As he drives them from the Temple his words are: *"My house will be called a house of prayer"* (Luke 19:46). They have not recognized the One cleansing the Temple, the One who came to his city in peace. They do not know the One who is now in their city.

What moves us to tears? Is it what is happening in our world today? We live in a world in turmoil. We see people, good people, losing everything they have. We see an uncertain future with walls crumbling all around us. Our defenses are failing. Where is Nehemiah when we need him? Our walls need rebuilding. Tears are present in many lives.

Our tears are not of tomorrow for we know the promises of tomorrow. Because of Christ we have a certain future even as we live in an uncertain present. We have a city made by God eternal in heavens—a city whose gates are never closed: *"Its gates will never be shut by day—and there is no night there"* (Rev. 21:25). It is a city of righteousness, justice and peace—a city that recognizes the One who came in the name of the Lord: A city of no more tears.

Today we come again to this Table of our Lord. We, on World Communion Sunday, celebrate this Table with brothers and sisters around the world. It is a Table that is open to all—A Table of the past, present and future. We come to a Table with a promise, a promise of "no more tears."

"See, the house of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 21:3-4).