



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

March 20, 2024  
Lenten Midweek 6  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 138 CW  
Passion History: [Reading 5](#)  
Sermon Text: [Luke 23:26-34](#)

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### God on Trial Sympathy

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

Maybe you've seen it in a courtroom, as we're talking about **God on Trial**, where someone has been accused of a crime and it's pretty clear that they did it. There is a lot of evidence against them. But as they have been arrested and as they start to build this story of defense, one of the things they really try to do is build a case of **sympathy**. Maybe they show that they are weak or older, or it's a case of **sympathy** where maybe the reasons they did what they did were because this other person caused them to lash out or to defend themselves. You can see people on trial often who will get you to try to have **sympathy** for them.

Isn't that a lot of what is going on in the world today as well? There are a lot of people in the world who want us to have **sympathy** for them. What I would call that more is actually a "victim" mentality. There is a lot of this idea that everyone is a victim. "I don't deserve what I have and I'm being mistreated. It's so hard in the position I am in." There is this idea that we have to have **sympathy** and that this person has been victimized. Do you think that is true? I think that is a huge thing that our world struggles with. Everyone wants to be a victim, or we are teaching people to find themselves as a victim and seek that **sympathy** from everyone else. "You've been wronged."

What about us as Christians? Do we tend to do that as well? Are we building a case and talking about how Christianity is being persecuted in the United States; how the world has changed and people need to have **sympathy** on us poor Christians. Are we, as Christians, also victims? Should people take pity on us because the world and culture has changed? It's something to think about.

As we look at **sympathy** and being a victim and having pity, who else to look at and think about having pity and **sympathy** on than Jesus as He is led to the cross and crucified. If there is one who we should have **sympathy** on, we should have sympathy on Jesus. We see what He looks like. We've read about what happened to Him as He was unfairly put on trial. He was innocent and lies were brought before Him. Not only that He was unfairly judged, but then what happened? He was mocked and beaten, had a crown of thorns put on Him, and He was beaten again. He was mocked over and over again. And now, finally, He is being led out to be crucified. You can just see Him— blood dripping down; His back torn up from lashes; miserable. But, as we see, the women have mercy on Him. They mourn for what is happening to Him. The people can certainly see He is worth mourning over; this sad look of a man and what has happened to Him.

But how does Jesus then respond to this wailing? What does Jesus say? He says this: "Don't cry for me. Don't have **sympathy** for me." He says something shocking. We look at our text in Verses 28 and following. ***Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then "they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"***" What is He speaking about here? He is speaking about how just a few days before this (there is a famous passage where Jesus weeps over Jerusalem) He mourns for them because they had rejected Him, as we see. [\(Luke 19:41-44\)](#) He wished to gather them like a mother hen gathers her chicks, but they rejected Him. They refused. [\(Luke 13:34\)](#) And then, we see what was going to happen.

Just a few decades after Jesus was crucified, the Roman Empire would come and something would happen in Jerusalem. The temple would be destroyed and there would be such horrible things that happen. He says that the people would say "Blessed are the women who did not have children." And people would cry out that the mountains fall on them. We won't go into the specifics of what happened there. You can look in the history books at some of the horrible things that happened in Jerusalem as Rome seized it and destroyed the temple. But you can hear His words and the prophecy about how horrible it would be.

So Jesus, in His moment of trouble, of being beaten and being one that you would have **sympathy** on, what does He do? He has **sympathy** on others. The words He speaks are very important. After He talks about how the people will say that the mountains "***Fall on us!***" and "***Cover us!***" and how horrible this is, He says these things. "***For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?***" What does He mean by this? He is saying He is suffering, He is being beaten and killed, but He is innocent. What about the people who are not innocent? What about the people who maybe deserve punishment or just the sinful people in general? He is

saying that He was innocent, but there are other people who are not. How much worse will that be? What will that look like? These are words for us to take to heart as well. Jesus truly was innocent and yet He suffered for us. So how should we be surprised that someone innocent is beaten and crucified and has this suffering? What about we, who are not perfect and who are sinful? What will happen to us sinful people?

When we think about Christianity in this country, it is very easy to get down and really talk about how bad things are. We talk about how so many people don't go to church anymore and the culture has shifted. The culture is more immoral. We can say that Christians are now mocked. We are looked down upon. We can kind of play the victim. We can be looking for **sympathy** and say "Woe to us!" But I think there are some important things to do when we look at that, when we are calling out for **sympathy** for ourselves. It's important to look at the big picture. When we think about our persecution and how Christianity is today in the United States, how does that compare to other Christians throughout the world? Some Christians are not able to gather in a public place like this to worship because it is outlawed. There are places where if people knew that you were a Christian, your life would be threatened and where just professing your faith as a Christian could be a death sentence. But then also, the idea is to think about when we think "Woe are we" and the suffering that we might face as a Christian and we really ask for that **sympathy**, we have to look at where we are focused. Are we focused on Christ and what He has done and the blessings that we have? Or are we focusing on ourselves?

Sometimes when we are seeking that **sympathy**, we are too focused on ourselves and not on God. When we look to complain, when we lash out, when we circle the wagons and cut ourselves off, we are no longer focusing on the good and what God has done and all the blessings, and maybe we begin to look outwardly at things that God doesn't want us to trust in. Things like earthly leaders for our hope and other systems to say "Can't we get back the glory days? Wouldn't it be great to get back to when Christianity was more popular?" We can look to the wrong things to give us hope.

So, when did God ever tell us to play the victim? In fact, we see the opposite. Jesus took up this cross and as He is suffering for us, He does not say "Have pity on me." He says to focus on others. Also, as He is there suffering and dying, as He is nailed on the cross, who does He have pity on? He has pity on those soldiers who are crucifying Him. What does He say? **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."** Forgive them? Have pity on the women? Jesus reveals a heart that is focused not on self but on others. He was always thinking about others and you and me and the world.

If Jesus didn't pity Himself, it's important to see what that meant. If He did pity Himself, what could He have done? As they mocked Him and said, "If you're the Son of God, come down," could He have done that? If He said "Oh, this is too much pain," He could

have come down from the cross and He could have saved Himself, but what would that have meant for us? He was so concerned about you and me that He did not escape His fate but instead, He was concerned about you and me and knew that we were facing something much worse. If He didn't suffer that eternal damnation, that punishment that we deserved, He suffered hell for you and me, where would we be? We deserve to face God's wrath on the Last Day.

It's the same picture where He said the people will say "Bring the mountains upon us! We deserve this horrible thing," but we know we don't get that because Jesus had **sympathy** on us. Jesus' heart went out for you and for me. He wept for you and for me. He takes the punishment that you and I deserve. He always had those sins of the world, of you and me and everyone, on His mind. **Sympathy** for us was on His mind, not for Himself. We know that He DID deserve that **sympathy**. That was obvious. But when we see that **sympathy** and what He deserved, we see the heart of Christ. We see the heart of God in the love for us.

We know that as we say that Jesus doesn't want us to look for **sympathy** isn't to say that sometimes He didn't deserve it or we don't deserve **sympathy** at times. We know that He can sympathize with us in our weaknesses, when we are suffering, when we are going through difficulties. He suffered for you and for me and was tempted in the ways that you and I are, understanding we live in this sinful, difficult world, where there is persecution, where there is difficulty. But when we are in that, do not have that self-pity and say "Woe to us," but He will help us to carry our own crosses, as He carried His cross. Know that we are not alone. Turn to Him and His Word. Turn to Him and His promises and the Word and Sacraments. Look past ourselves and cling to Him and to His cross that means salvation for us.

When we are feeling those temptations or feeling the difficulties of persecution in this life, we are not alone. Other Christians have gone through that, and more than that, Christ was one who suffered more than all of us. Remember the promises that He is with you and that Christ was perfect for you.

What also can we do in those sympathies as well, in our difficulties and troubles? Think about those who are mocking and ridiculing you. What did Jesus do? He had **sympathy** on them. Think about the world that we live in and what many people believe. So many people do not believe in God. They don't believe in Jesus. So what are they living for? They are living for this world. They think that maybe if you're a good person, that's how you get to heaven, or maybe that there is no afterlife so they just go on living and just like the people of Jerusalem, something awaits. There is the Day of Judgement. We can have **sympathy** on them because we want them to know the truth.

The truth is that many people are being deceived. The lies of Satan are real and will lead them away from the truth of God and the promises that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life [\(John 14:6\)](#) and that we can have salvation through Christ. But many people believe the lies. We can have **sympathy** on them and share that message, not just Law, not just condemning them or saying "What you say is wrong," but by talking about the peace and joy that you have even in the midst of suffering. When we see our crosses and our difficulties, we can talk about them and say "Woe is me," "Woe to us," but when we see the cross, we also see that God is giving us these crosses, these difficulties, why? He is giving us these difficulties to help us to trust in Him and to lean on His grace and mercy for forgiveness, so we don't trust in our own ways and the lies that the devil gives. We can have **sympathy** and give them that Gospel, to point them to the cross that gives peace and hope, now and in eternity.

So as we look at and talk about **sympathy** and the world talks about being a victim, do you need to be a victim? Do you need to look and say "Woe to us, as Christians, because this world is turning their back on Christianity and mocking us"? No. The world has always despised the teachings of God and Christ. That is nothing new. But our hope is not in this world. Our hope is in Christ and the forgiveness of sins and the peace that comes from knowing Jesus and the peace that God promises will not let us down. So we don't have to be victims.

Instead, what are we? We are victors. That's what Christ will show as He suffered on the cross and a few days later He rose again, showing that He was victorious over sin, death and the devil. That's what Easter is all about. As we look to the cross, we don't have to look only at the suffering. We can also look at the victory that is Christ, but it is also given to you. So dear brothers and sisters; don't play the victim. Know that you are victorious through the work of Christ because He died and rose for you eternally. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.