

Comparisons can help us to understand new things. When the Bible speaks about the coins which were in use at that time, we compare them to the coins which we use today so that we can better understand the point being made. In order to understand size, we frequently compare it to something that is familiar. So when the Bible says that Noah's ark was to be 300 cubits long, we compare it to the length of one and a half football fields. At other times, comparisons are between things that are quite dissimilar. When Jesus wants us to understand how much the Lord watches over us and takes care of us, He tells us that God even has each hair on our head numbered. Comparisons like these are helpful in allowing us to understand a new concept. This evening, in our final Lenten service, we see Jesus using just such a comparison. He asks, **IF MEN DO THESE THINGS WHEN THE TREE IS GREEN, WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN IT IS DRY?** Obviously Jesus is not speaking about trees, He is trying to teach each one of us a valuable lesson. As we take a closer look at this, we shall see that Jesus is the green tree, and we are the dry tree.

Since Jesus had been sentenced to be crucified, He was being led out of the city. On the way, **"A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him."** (27) These people probably were not ones who looked to Jesus in faith. Rather, what they seemed to feel toward Jesus was nothing more than pity. Imagine, a well known teacher like Jesus, condemned to die even though He did nothing worthy of such a death. So they were mourning over Him as though He were already dead. This was not the type of emotion which Jesus wanted from them.

Therefore He tried to get them to understand what was really going on. So He uses this comparison: **"If men do these things when the tree is green what will happen when it is dry?"** (31) A green tree is one that is alive and will probably be producing fruit. It is something which people normally want. We all know that green wood does not burn very well. If a tree is all dried up and produces no fruit, then we seek to burn it up in a fire where it would burn up quickly and completely. Jesus tells us that He is a green, living tree who does not deserve to die. What He means is that He is the righteous Son of God. We know that He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. We know that we are redeemed, not with gold or silver, but with the holy, precious blood and the innocent sufferings and death of God's own Son, Jesus. Jesus was not just connected to the water of life, but He is the water which brings life to all men. He is truly a green, living tree.

But just look at what was happening to Him. He was being led out to be crucified. Even though He was without sin, yet the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all. In this way God's perfect justice was going to be fulfilled, for every sin ever committed was being paid for by Jesus, His holy Son. God's justice demanded that punishment, even if it cost Him the suffering and death of His own Son.

So if Jesus were the green, living tree, the One who was totally pleasing to His heavenly Father, and all of this was still happening to Him, there was no sense in these people mourning and grieving over Him, they ought to be looking at themselves. If God did not spare His own Son in His divine justice, certainly He is not going to spare anyone on this earth who does not live up to His standard of perfection. That is why Jesus told them not to weep and mourn for Him, but for themselves, because if they did not repent, they would also be experiencing great pain and suffering. An example of this came when Jerusalem was destroyed about forty years after this.

Jesus is the green, living tree, and still He suffered the punishment of God Himself to atone for the sin of the world. If that happened to Him, what will happen when the tree is dry? We are the dry tree. We are not alive spiritually. We are dead in our sins. We are without life. We are ready to be burned up eternally in the fires of hell because of our sins. That is exactly what should happen to us.

But because the green tree, Jesus, came and took our place, we do not have to burn eternally in hell. Jesus offers each one of us life through the living water which He so freely gives. He desires to come into our hearts and cleanse them with His blood. When He does this, we will not have to endure the sufferings

which Jesus went through on our behalf. But still, our hearts will be filled with sorrow as we weep and mourn. But we will not be weeping and mourning over the terrible things which happened to Jesus, we will be doing that over our own sins, which caused Jesus to have to endure those sufferings. Our weeping and mourning over our sins is nothing more than repentance, which Jesus wants from each one of us.

Yet, even as we have been given life eternal by Jesus, we will still recognize that while Jesus was the green tree, the world still hated Him and wanted to destroy Him. We dare not expect anything less for ourselves. Christianity does not mean that we will be free from the troubles in this life. In fact, as we take up our cross to follow Jesus, we will come to realize that being a Christian will bring us many extra troubles that do not affect those who reject God's salvation. But we will gladly and willingly bear up under them all because we know the crown of life which Jesus offers to us will really be worth it.

Yet, we also need to take to heart the warning that Jesus gives us in this comparison. If God did not spare His holy Son when He took upon Himself all of our sins, certainly He will not spare those who reject the salvation which Jesus offers. Again the destruction of Jerusalem which Jesus referred to was just a warning from God that He is serious, and will not tolerate those who reject Him and the only way to eternal life which He offers through Jesus. They will burn eternally in hell.

Jesus reminds us of what happens to green wood and dry wood, and then compares that to Himself who is the holy Son of God, and we who are dead in sin by nature. This comparison is very striking, because we do not want to burn eternally in hell. Because Jesus endured the many sufferings He did, we no longer have to, for He offers us life. As we draw this season of Lent to a close, let us be reminded that the sorrow which we express in this season is not sorrow for Jesus, but it is sorrow over our sins which made it necessary for Him to go through all of this. Then, at the same time, we will rejoice because we know that because He did endure those sufferings, we will now have life eternal.