

“Do Not Weep for Me”: Learning to Cry like a Christian

Introduction

The Text

²⁷ And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. ²⁸ But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ ³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” (Luke 23:27–31)

When’s the Last Time You Cried?

A. I wonder, when’s the last time you cried?

1. For some of us perhaps it’s been so long ago we can barely remember it. Men especially, on the stereotype at least, tend to steel themselves against such emotional expression.
2. For others of us maybe you’ve spent far too many of your days and late nights up crying. Maybe there were tears in your eyes just this morning. You were wiping them away in the car just before opening the door and making your way in here.

B. But we should add to the question of when? . . . the question of what? What do you cry about? What gets you emotionally worked up with sorrow? What undams the flow of your tears?

1. Maybe your dreams were dashed.
2. Maybe a coworker slandered you behind your back.
3. Maybe a competitor outperformed you.
4. Maybe a significant other rejected you or cheated on you.
5. Maybe you lost a pregnancy.
6. Maybe you buried a parent.

C. I open this way because, in our text, it seems to me Jesus is trying to recalibrate our weeping as it were. He’s going to talk to us about our mourning, the wrong and the right of it. He’s going to help us learn how to cry like a Christian.

D. Now, I’m going to organize my thoughts here under two headings, and you should know, for these I’m essentially borrowing the categories introduced by the apostle Paul in [2 Cor. 7](#).

1. There he talks about how some people cry with a worldly sort of sorrow—there’s something a bit superficial and self-centered about it.

2. And others, they cry with a godly sorrow, a godly grief—their tears are more substantial, they’re weeping is more aligned with reality and things.
 - a. We’ll likely revisit that text a bit later, but for now at least, I just wanted to use his basic division there as my two headings: (1) Worldly Weeping; and (2) Godly Grief.

(1) Worldly Weeping

Two Opening Observations

- A. Now, before I dive into this first heading, I should at least make a couple observations by way of introduction.

Observation #1: Not All Are Mocking and Scoffing

- A. For one thing we must let sink in what Luke says there in v. 27—that there “followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him.”
- B. The indication, it seems to me, is that there are many who, at least superficially, are still on team Jesus, they care about him. That’s where these ladies are. They are sad for Jesus and deeply troubled by what’s taken place thus far, with the mock trial and the scourging and things.
 1. The word for “mourning” here is the Gk. *koptō* which includes the idea of beating one’s breast in grief. There’s a certain violence to it.
 2. The word for “lamenting” here points us towards the loud cries and sounds that would accompany such sorrow. As one commentator puts it: “The impression we get is of a noisy demonstration of deep grief” (TNTC).
- C. The point in all this is to see that not everyone is mocking and scoffing as the religious leaders and the Roman soldiers have been. Some are crying . . . violently, loudly.
 1. But as we’ll see, even this crying falls short of what is actually appropriate and wise.

Observation #2: Jesus Is Still Concerned for the Welfare of Others!

- A. The second thing to note (and this is amazing!) is that Jesus, even on his way to the cross, even when he’s so weak from the whippings that the soldiers had to tap another man, Simon, to carry his crossbeam, even when all the world seems to be crashing down upon him . . . he’s still concerned for the welfare of others.
- B. So when he sees the misguided sorrow and sympathy of these ladies, and, out of compassion for them, he’s inclined to help them, to reorient them. I mean think of this!
 1. Wouldn’t we just love sympathy in these moments? Isn’t what usually frustrates us the most is when we are struggling and suffering and no one pays us any mind? The sense of being alone intensifies the agony. Sympathy from another alleviates and helps.

- C. To give a silly example, when I'm doing the dishes or cleaning up after the end of the day, sometimes I put in my earbuds and have a decent time of it. But other times, oh no, I'm not in the mood. And Megs calls me out for harrumphing about, stomping my feet and things, like a toddler who's been told it's time to put his toys away.
1. But what is this? Don't you see, I'm letting people know I'm unhappy. "I'm suffering here . . . alone! Somebody notice me. Somebody sympathize with me. Somebody weep for me." Isn't that what we want?
- D. What if you were Jesus? You just got out from a scene where everyone's calling for your crucifixion, slapping you and laughing at you. Wouldn't it just be so refreshing to now have at least a few who are crying for you, who are feeling with you?
1. Well, I suppose myself, as self-centered as I am, I would say something like: "Finally, I get some love around here."
 2. But not Jesus. You see, he's concerned, not for himself, but for them. And though they are weeping for him, he realizes it is not for the right reasons. There is still something superficial in this sympathy, and so, in love, he tries to recalibrate it. He tries to help.
 - a. It's as one commentator puts it: "Jesus is not looking for sympathy, but for conversion!" It's not about him. It's about them. Us. What a Savior!

Four Shades of Sorrow

- A. Now, let's consider this worldly weeping in a bit more detail. Let's talk about the emotional experience and expression of sorrow that pulls up short from the sort of thing Jesus wants for us.
1. It seems to me there's a sort of spectrum to all this. There are various shades of worldly sorrow, as it were—different ways that we experience it. But, again, none get to the deepest and truest expression of it.
 - a. So let me outline some of these shades now . . .

Shade #1: All Sorrow

- A. On the one hand, we must say there are some of us who think the only true emotion in this broken life is that of sorrow, right?
1. All joy it seems to these folks is superficial, a whistling past the graveyard. This world is nothing short of a dumpster fire. Just turn on the news and prove me otherwise.
 - a. You get stuck in your sorrow. You're in the pit of grief and it seems there's really no point in even trying to claw out.
- B. This is Job in [Job 10:18-19](#): "¹⁸ Why did you bring me out from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me ¹⁹ and were as though I had not been, carried from the womb to the grave." "I'd rather have just gone straight from womb to grave than come out and live in this nightmarish place. Why'd you bring me out here? Just to make me hurt?"

- C. It sounds grim, but this is how some of us experience this place. It's all sorrow. If that's where you are, know that Jesus can help. But we'll get there.

Shade #2: No Sorrow

- A. But then there are others who take it to the other extreme. If there are some who drown themselves under waves of sadness, there are others who bury themselves, their heads at least, in the sand.
 - 1. They won't admit of any sadness. They refuse to feel it, talk about it, experience it. They have hardship in their life like the rest, oh sure, but you try to ask them about it, and you get nothing. They won't go there. They won't shed a tear.
- B. You know, I think Americans in particular seem prone to this sort of thing. We don't like the sad stuff of life. We don't know how to deal with it.
 - 1. In a book I've been reading the author talks about how strange it seems to other cultures that here in America, instead of a funeral and time for grieving a lost loved one, we're often doing these "celebration of life" things instead.
 - a. Now, don't get me wrong, I get the sentiment, the desire to celebrate a person's life, not just grieve their death. I think that's fine.
 - b. But sometimes we can use these things as a way of dodging those hard emotions, as a way of trying to bypass tears and grief, because we don't like it, we don't want to face it. And that's not healthy. That's not human.
- C. Our relationship with sorrow gets out of joint. We don't want any of it.

Shade #3: Self-Coddling Sorrow

- A. Here's another one. Sometimes we can be sad, but out of this overexaggerated concern for self. We're not concerned about others, we're certainly not worried about God. It's just about me.
- B. Again, like that tantruming toddler, right? If you have kids, you've seen this. They disobey you or something, and so you take away dessert or some privilege, and what do they do? They start to cry. And for a moment you think maybe the truth of the matter is settling in. Maybe they get that you can't hit your sibling. Maybe they get that you've hurt your relationship with others and with mommy and daddy. They're crying. They get it, right?
 - 1. I can't tell you how many times this happens with Levi, where he gets a consequence, and he gets all downtrodden, then he comes in for a hug and all this, and I'm applauding myself for my good parenting, he's getting it, and then he looks up: "So can I have dessert now?"
 - a. And you're like that's all this has been about. A great production of tears, not with concern for our relationship or sin or things like this, but because he had his desert taken away and he wants it. It's self-coddling sorrow. And we all do it.

C. I said we might return to [2 Cor. 7](#) and this is the time to do it. There Paul is referring to a “severe” letter he had previously written to the Corinthian church addressing some sin in the camp. And, understandably, the letter was both hard to write and hard to read.

1. But here’s what he says, [vv. 8-10](#): “⁸ [E]ven if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while.⁹ As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”

a. Don’t you see it? There are our two categories of sorrow or grief. Godly and worldly. The one leads to repentance and faith and salvation. The other leads further down the hole to death.

i. But, here’s the thing to notice, in both instances you are sad—just for different reasons, with different motivations. And this worldly grief is that where you’re sad, but it has more to do with your temporal circumstances and love for self than it does with love for God and others. And, hence, it only makes matters worse.

D. This may be where these ladies are in our text. They’re putting on this show of concern for Jesus but it’s really about them.

1. This would be like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, right? When Jesus appears to them and asks them what’s the matter, Luke tells us that “[they stood still, looking sad](#)” ([Luke 24:17](#)). And they proceed to speak of the great letdown they’d had with this one Jesus of Nazareth, saying: “[W]e had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel (v. 21) . . . to overthrow Rome, to reestablish the kingdom here in Jerusalem, that sort of thing. But, alas, he’s dead. We’re sad (you see), not so much because we love Jesus, but because we love ourselves and we didn’t get what we wanted from the deal.”

E. Is that where your sorrow is a lot of the time? Does all your grief orbit around you and your worldly concerns and comforts? “Do I still get my dessert?” Is it a self-coddling sort of thing?

Shade #4: Others-Coddling Sorrow

A. Now this one’s especially tricky. It looks good on the outside. You’re not just wallowing in self-pity now. Now you’re weeping with those who weep, right?

1. But it’s a sort of superficial sympathy. It isn’t calibrated to eternity and the deeper realities of God’s Word and world. And, hence, it too comes up short.

B. I think it’s especially likely that this is where those ladies are at in our text. They feel sad for Jesus, but, as we’ve said, there’s something disjointed about their sympathy. It would save anyone from suffering at any cost and can’t see that God might indeed have a plan in it.

- C. I thought of Paul as the Spirit was leading him to Jerusalem where he would suffer for the sake of the Name.
1. And he stops in to visit the church in Caesarea and when Agabus the prophet comes in and says suffering is waiting for you in Jerusalem, all the believers, including Luke it would seem, “urged him not to go up to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:12).
 2. But Paul pushes back on all of this and says: “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (v. 13).
 3. And then we read: “And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, ‘Let the will of the Lord be done’” (v. 14).
 - a. But you hear it, right? There is a sorrow for others that would actually keep them from fulfilling God’s will for their life. It’s superficial, it’s nearsighted, it’s coddling, it’s enabling.
- D. Frankly, to give you a modern example, it’s the sort of thing we see going down today with the church and the LGBTQ issue.
1. For those who are struggling with same-sex attraction, or gender identity, or confusion in this way, we want to have sympathy for them, and we should, but not to the degree where we would abandon truth and God’s word and will to make them happy.
 - a. So many churches these days, in the name of compassion, are willing to just dilute, and get a little squishy on what the Bible says clearly on this point. “We don’t want to make you uncomfortable or unhappy. Isn’t this sympathy and love? Isn’t this what God would do?”
- E. And we don’t serve them well. We lead them astray. You see how, as it’s been said, “a half-truth masquerading as a whole truth is a complete untruth.” This is not true sorrow for the suffering. This is others-coddling sorrow.
1. We should weep with those struggling with these things, oh yes, but we must still orient ourselves to God’s Word and eternity, or we will be of no ultimate help to them nor anyone in the end!

(2) Godly Grief

Recalibrating Our Sorrow

- A. So now, then, we come to this idea of godly grief—the right way, the Christian way, to cry.
- B. This is where we begin to especially tune into what Jesus has to say to these ladies here.
1. And what we find is that godly grief takes all these reductions and half-truths that are there in worldly grief and corrects them, fills them out a bit, recalibrates them.

Recalibration #1: “Do not weep for me . . .”

- A. Against the idea that life is all sorrow, the Christian worldview has always said that it’s joy, not sorrow, that gets the last word in this story.
 - 1. Look at how the Bible ends for the people of God. It’s a party for the ages, literally. And one of the climactic moments is when we will be taken up into the lap of God, as it were, and we’re told in [Rev. 21:4](#): “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”
 - a. In the memorable words of King David: “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning” ([Ps. 30:5](#)).
- B. So the first thing Jesus says to these ladies here is: “[Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me . . .](#)” ([Luke 23:28](#)).
 - 1. You say, “How could that be?!” He’s got a crown of thorns on his head at this point. He’s got lashings up and down his back. Blood everywhere. A crowd of angry people demanding his death. “[Don’t weep for me](#)?!” How can he say that?!
 - a. Because he knows how this story is going to end. He’s calibrated his emotional life to eternal realities and the plan of God and he knows Friday’s rough, but Sunday’s coming.
- C. This is why in [Luke 8:52](#), he says to the crowd gathered around a man’s dead daughter: “[Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping.](#)”
 - 1. They all laugh, because he seems like a madman, out of touch with reality. Weeping is all there is to do here now. And then, with a word, he wakes the little girl up. And they rejoice!
- D. This is why Paul says in [1 Th. 4:13-14](#): “¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”
- E. So against our notion that all of life is brokenness and sorrow, Jesus says there’s great reason to hope and, even, rejoice! Some of us really need to hear that this morning.

Recalibration #2: “. . . but weep . . .”

- A. But lest we go to another unhealthy extreme, we recognize that while the final note that Christianity strikes is one of ultimate and everlasting joy, it’s okay to cry a lot in this life. It hurts. It’s hard.
- B. So Jesus turns to these ladies and says: “[Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep . . .](#)” ([Luke 23:28](#)).

1. Don't weep, but weep! Grief doesn't define us, but that doesn't mean we don't still experience it and work it through it before the Lord . . . with hope.
- C. The last thing I want is a church full of plastic people who think because God is good and all this that it would be wrong to be sad and feel grief and things.
1. No! King David, whom I just quoted as saying I know joy wins, spends a good portion of the Psalms just crying.
 2. And Jesus who just got done telling these girls don't weep for me had only a few hours earlier been on his face in Gethsemane where he was, no doubt, weeping in light of what he would have to face. [Heb. 5:7](#): "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears . . ."
 3. Or Jesus, again, though he knows he's going to raise Lazarus up from the dead in just a moment, when he sees the pain and the grief of his friends, he weeps. [John 11:35](#), one of the shortest and one of the most profound verses in all the Bible: "Jesus wept."
 4. And so Paul gives us that strange paradox when he's describing his experience as a servant of God. He says, "[I'm] sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" ([2 Cor. 6:10](#)). I'm not plastic. I feel. I weep. I know it's good. I know God's got me. But it's still hard. And I cry a lot.
- D. So I want you to hear Jesus' invitation to weep. Having faith doesn't mean you're always smiley. Sometimes it means you're crying . . . but you're crying (and crawling) towards God.

Recalibration #3: ". . . for yourselves . . ."

- A. But Jesus isn't just talking about weeping in general over hardship here, is he (though I wanted to bring that out for a moment). In the context, he's taking it a bit deeper. So he says: "[Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves . . .](#)" ([Luke 23:28](#)).
1. And with this now start to see him correct and recalibrate that whole self-coddling sorrow we talked about.
 - a. Because he goes on to talk about why we should weep for ourselves, and it's not merely because we lost our dessert, or whatever.
 - b. It's because in our sin we've lost God and judgment is coming if we keep on this road. He wants us to calibrate our weeping for ourselves with eternal realities.
- B. That's where he goes in [vv. 29-31](#) to which I'd direct your attention now: "²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' ³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?"
1. I don't have much time for this, but let me at least say a few things here . . .
- C. First, there's clear connection between Jesus' words here and what he said back in [Luke 21, vv. 20-24](#) in particular.

1. And with that, we know that he's referring here both to the more immediate destruction coming for Jerusalem in 70 A.D. but also and especially that judgement (foreshadowed there) that is coming at the end of the age.
 - a. He's trying to get them to consider where they stand with God and to turn from their unbelief and their hardness of heart. You can weep and be moved momentarily by the suffering of Jesus and things, but these ladies, according Jesus' estimation, clearly have not gone deep enough in it all.
 - i. They don't realize that they stand to face God's wrath if they don't turn from their sin and fully embrace the Son and his sacrifice on their behalf.
- D. That's why he goes on with that reference to crying out for mountains to fall and hills to cover.
1. With this he's reaching back into the Old Testament imagery of judgment as in texts like [Hos. 10:8](#) and [Isa. 2:19](#).
 2. But even more he's pointing us forward to texts like that in [Rev. 6:12-17](#) that talk specifically about the end of the world and the wrath of God that will be poured out against unrepentant sinners.
- E. So here is the idea is, yes, weep for yourself—only weep for the deeper things. Weep over your sin, be sure you've fled to the Son for refuge now.
- a. This is why he said earlier in [Luke 6](#), "[Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep \[then\]](#)" (v. 25). But "[Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall \[then\] laugh](#)" (v. 21).
 - b. This is why James would say in a similar vein: "⁸ [Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.](#) ⁹ [Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.](#) ¹⁰ [Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you](#)" ([James 4:8–10](#)).
- F. That last saying there in [v. 31](#) while a bit enigmatic seems simply to mean this: If such horrible things are befalling the innocent Son of God (e.g. the "green wood"), how much worse will judgment be when it comes for the guilty (e.g. the "dry wood")?
1. Take this seriously! Are you right with God? Have you ever wept over your sin, not just because of its unfortunate consequences in your life, but because of what it's done to your relationship with God and others?

Recalibration #4: ". . . and for your children."

- A. Just as Jesus moves us from self-coddling sorrow to that deeper godly sorrow for ourselves that sees things in light of eternity, we see that he does the same sort of thing with our sorrow as it pertains to others as well. Hence, the last part of [v. 28](#) there: "[Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.](#)"

- B. With this I'd just bring out the idea that we ought to be crying for others, it's true. We ought to be emotionally involved in the welfare of others. Sure, weep for the temporal hardships and sufferings that they have. But ultimately, let your sorrow be driven by eternal things.
1. This is Jesus weeping over Jerusalem back in [Luke 19:41-44](#).
 2. This is Paul weeping over his fellow Israelites in [Rom 9](#): “¹ I am speaking the truth in Christ— I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.” (vv. 1–2).
- C. When's the last time you really wept over the unbelieving in view of eternity and coming judgment? When's the last time you felt so deeply that it moved you to action?
1. This is why Paul wrote that severe letter I referenced to the Corinthians. Listen to what he says: “I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you” (2 Cor. 2:4).
 - a. “I'm crying over you. I love you.” It's not empty coddling, it's not superficial sympathy, it's emotional expression, godly grief for others in view of reality and eternity. “I want you to be right with God!”

Conclusion

- A. Here's the last thing I'll say. Jesus pushes back on these ladies a bit because they're weeping over him for the wrong reasons. But you know there is a way to weep over him rightly. And it kind of brings all that we've been saying together.
- B. I'm thinking here of texts like [Zech. 12:10](#): “I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.”
1. When you get it, you cry. Pierced by you. Pierced for you.
- C. This is that woman who literally weeps over Jesus back in [Luke 7](#). You remember. It's a dinner party, and all the religious up-and-ups are there. And then in breaks this woman of the streets, a sinner, we're told. She wasn't invited, but she doesn't care. Because Jesus is there. And she gets it.
1. She's on the ground before him weeping, washing his feet with her tears and hair. And Jesus doesn't push back on her. Oh no. He holds her up for those religious type to see and says: “Now here's true religion. This is how people respond when they get that, though their sins are many, my mercy is more. She who has been forgiven much loves much . . . and weeps much . . . in all the right ways.”
- D. That, brothers and sisters, is how you cry like a Christian. Don't you want to join her?!