

When God Weeps

Introduction

- A. Unless you're new with us, no doubt you recall that for a number of years now we've been trekking through the gospel of Luke on Sundays. I looked back and I think it's been now 22 weeks that we've stepped out from that. It started with the Week of Prayer back at the end of February and then moved into all this Coronavirus stuff and the Do Not Be Afraid . . . series we did. We have even had a couple sermons there on The Issue of Race and the Gospel of Grace. Well, after a long pause, then, I feel like it's time to get back in. I'm excited!

The Text

⁴¹ And when he drew near and saw the city [Jerusalem], he wept over it, ⁴² saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side ⁴⁴ and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:41–44)

The Love of God for You in Christ

- A. I wonder how many have struggled with the thought of God's love for you.
1. I wonder how many, aware of the great piling up of sins past and present, are growing more confident by the day that Jesus shall surely be done with you, if not already, then certainly soon.
 2. I wonder how many hear the gospel preached week after week—the good news of the love of God for all in Christ—and, just as the sun's light is beginning to break through, yet another dark cloud of guilt and shame and condemnation passes in between, keeping you in cold and shadow.
 - a. "It could not be. At least not for me. Jesus could never receive me, accept me, forgive me, love me."
- B. Well, if that's you, listen to me: On the authority of the text we have set before us this morning, I say emphatically to you: Yes He could and He undoubtedly will. Only come to Him and see!
1. The love of God for you in Christ is like a sky without circumference, an ocean without bottom, a wellspring with everlasting supply.
 - a. If you could count up all the stars then perhaps you could quantify it.
 - b. If you could gather up every kernel of sand from every coastal shore and place it in on a scale, then perhaps you could weigh it.

- c. If you could drain the five oceans of their water then perhaps you could exhaust it.
 - i. But, as it is, you cannot!

C. O fellow sinner, the love of God for you in Christ is unimaginably great. Take heart and draw near!

A Strange Way to Open

A. Now, this may seem a very strange way to open this sermon given the opening verses we just read.

1. There we see this graphic discussion of a city being torn down, even children falling victim, with every stone tumbling to the dust. It's a prophetic and vivid depiction of God's judgment and wrath coming for a wicked and rebellious city, His wicked and rebellious city, Jerusalem.

2. And yet here I am talking about God's love?!

- a. It seems out of place, out of touch, does it not? Perhaps a bit of wishful thinking? Perhaps a preacher's sleight of hand. I'd rather not discuss these harsher realities so I'll massage things to focus in on matters more palatable, more pleasant, more popular.

B. Is that what's going on here? Have I lost my biblical bearings? I don't think so.

1. You see, critical to rightly interpreting these words from Jesus is that we get a clear sense and handle on the tone in which He is speaking them.

C. I think we're all experiencing something a bit analogous to this lately with everyone wearing masks. We're becoming more aware, I think, that communication is a lot more than mere words—in this case it's facial expressions and things like this.

1. Haven't you found it a bit difficult at times to not be able to see the person's face when you're talking? All I got are those eyes and maybe the lines on your brow and stuff. I can't tell if you're smiling or frowning under there. And that sort of stuff helps me interpret rightly what you're saying. Are you joking, are you angry, or something else? I don't know.

D. And I think the same confusion can sometimes carry over to biblical interpretation. We're not always given any clues as to the tone or the facial expressions of Christ when He's sharing things. And so we may be prone to read a text and hear it through our grid. "Ah, he must be angry. I knew it. He's vengeful. He's callous. He's through with me."

1. But, every now and then, we get a little help in the context. In this case Luke takes us behind the mask as it were, shows us what's happening on His face, and shares with us something of His tone.

- a. Is Jesus here raising His voice in anger? Is He talking in an aggravated and condemning way with lighter fluid on His lips and fire-sparks in His eyes? Are these the words of a God come in rage and wrath?

- i. No! But how can I be so sure?
- E. Well, the key to unlocking the matter is found there in v. 41. You noticed did you not: “⁴¹ And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it . . .” (v. 41).
- 1. “Wept” here in the Greek implies deep and audible sorrow and might properly be rendered “wailed.” As Jesus looked out over Jerusalem, one commentator puts it like this: “[He] burst into sobbing” (TNTC).
 - a. It’s a stunning image! There are no fire-sparks in His eyes as He’s saying all of this, only tears—tears of empathy and compassion, tears of longing . . . and of love!

Our Weeping God!

- A. Who could have thought?! At the very center of our faith is a weeping God.
- 1. It sounds strange to our ears. It seems maybe foolish, maybe weak. But truly it is wisdom and strength and fraught with redemptive significance.
- B. So this morning we’re going to consider our Savior’s weeping in particular. We’re going to look at both: (1) What His Weeping Means; and (2) What His Weeping Doesn’t Mean.

(1) What His Weeping Means

- A. I have two meanings I want to bring out here . . .

Meaning #1: He Weeps Because He Came to His Own People and They Did Not Receive Him

- A. With the way I worded this here I have in my mind, obviously, that text in [John 1](#), where John is just elevating Jesus to such a height—clearly speaking of Him as God, referencing His eternity, and His incarnation, and also, especially, His rejection.
- 1. Speaking of Jesus, John writes: “⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him” (vv. 9–11).
 - a. This could be understood generally to refer to the fact that all people have been created by God and have uniformly rejected Him.
 - b. But it also, and I think especially, can be understood with reference to the Jewish people in particular. For, in a unique way, they were the chosen people of God—set apart by Him since Abraham to mediate blessing and salvation to the nations round about them.

- B. God had done so much through the centuries to prepare them for the Christ and His mission—pointing them towards Him with every promise and prophecy, symbol and shadow.
1. And yet, when at last the time has come for His arrival, they reject Him to the man.
 - a. So Jesus, now making His last journey into the capital city of the Jewish people (Jerusalem), and entering into the last week of His life, looks out over it all and just starts weeping.
- C. And when He opens His mouth to speak, we get the sense that it is this stuff here described by John that is on His mind. [Verse 42](#): “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!”
1. Note the emphasis, “[even you](#),” as if to say: “Certainly you above all others should have been ready and waiting for this day, and yet you’re not!”
- D. Oh sure, it is true, some of His disciples did just cry out in praise speaking of “[peace in heaven and glory in the highest!](#)” ([Luke 19:38](#)), but Jesus knows they have no true understanding of it. They think the peace He’s come to bring means liberation from Rome, not liberation from Satan, sin, and death; from God’s judgment and God’s wrath.
1. Here is the peace that’s really needed. Here is the peace He’s come to bring. Here is the peace spoken of time and again in the Scriptures that God has entrusted to the Jewish people in particular.
 - a. Texts like [Isaiah 53:5](#): “[H]e was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”
 - i. That’s the peace Jesus is making here. Peace with God through the blood of His cross ([Col 1:20](#)).
- E. And though this city, Jerusalem, as a word, came to mean for the Hebrew “the foundation/city of peace,” ironically, tragically, no one in this city gets it.
1. In fact, it would seem that some of the very same people who were praising Him upon His entrance of Jerusalem on Sunday will be calling for His crucifixion on Friday. “Whatever peace He’s come to make, it isn’t the kind of peace we want: ‘[Crucify Him!](#)’”
- F. I went to Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. And I don’t know if you remember this, but it was there in Philly where some of the classic Rocky movies were filmed. And, of course, one of most famous scenes in that whole series was when Rocky was training and running through the city for miles, and he ends with this all out sprint up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art there just as the sun’s coming up, and he just lifts up his arms like a champ and starts shadow boxing and jumping around. Those steps became known as the “Rocky Steps” ever since. They’ve got a big old statue of Rocky at the base of them, and tourists would be there around the clock, taking pics, running the steps, dancing around like Rocky on the top. My girls and I definitely did it a number of times :)

1. Well, I remember seeing something in the news, it became kind of a big deal, about how one time when all these people were out there snapping photos and going up and down and things, Sylvester Stallone, Rocky himself, actually showed up. And, of course, once people recognized him, they just started going crazy. It's as if Rocky had kind of returned to his "holy land" as it were. And all the people rejoiced.
- G. But here's where I'm going with this: The contrast between what Sylvester Stallone received upon returning to his old stomping ground and that which Jesus receives here when He's coming home to his people in Jerusalem is staggering. The one is exalted, celebrated, praised. The other is strung up and murdered.
1. And Jesus, again, knowing this is what awaits, looks out over the city and just starts bawling.
- H. And I think we've got to ask. Are we giving Him any reason to weep over us? As Oswald Chambers asks when commenting on these verses: "[Is there anything that is blinding] you to the peace of God 'in this your day'?" These are probing questions, and ones we would do well to sit with and let search us for a while.
1. Are we ready and waiting for a visitation from God, or are we busy running after other stuff—it could be worldly stuff, it could even be religious stuff, like so many in Israel, busy with their religion, but missing Jesus!

Meaning #2: He Weeps Because, Contrary to All Expectation, He Still Loves

- A. Listen, after all I've been saying thus far, we might be prone to think: "Weeping? Of course, He's weeping, He's hurting, He's being rejected. People don't like Him. They want to kill Him. That sort of stuff would make me cry too."
1. But that's not exactly it, is it? Jesus isn't weeping with concern for Himself. He is weeping with concern for others. These aren't tears of self-pity. These are tears of compassion.
 - a. He is crying in love for the very people who hate Him. It's a startling thought.
- B. If I'm honest with you, I do a lot of crying, but 99% is just all about me.
1. I walk out of my office at the end of the day and see the ridiculous mess the kids have made of the yard I just cleaned the day before—it's like a live with a pack of wild animals or something. And oh I'm crying. But not with concern for my kids and their hearts or whatever. I'm crying about me and my comforts and what I want. It's ridiculous.
 - a. It's so self-centered, so small-souled. And we're not even close to talking about crying in love for people that hate me.
- C. Think of this . . .
1. Jesus, looking out over this city, knows so many are already cooking up a plan to trap Him. And so He's weeping in love for them.

2. Jesus, looking out over this city, knows Judas is going to betray Him to get his greedy hands on a few silly pieces of silver. And so He's weeping in love for him.
3. Jesus, looking out over this city, knows, Thursday night, they're going to come for Him with swords and clubs like they would for a criminal. And so He's weeping in love for them.
4. Jesus, looking out over this city, knows they're going to mock, beat, falsely accuse, and hand Him over to the Gentiles. And so He's weeping in love for them.
5. Jesus, looking out over this city, knows they're going to cry for Barabbas' freedom instead of His own. And so He's weeping in love for them.
6. Jesus, looking out over this city, knows they're going to call for His crucifixion and stand round applauding as the nails go through. And so He's weeping in love for them.
7. Jesus, looking out over this city, knows they are missing out on His offer of grace and peace and redemption. And so He's weeping in love for them.

- a. All of this betrayal and rejection would make our blood boil with rage. But all it seems to do for Jesus is stir up His affection and compassion all the more. He's not crying for Himself. He's crying for them.

D. Dane Ortlund in his new book *Gentle and Lowly* says: "Jesus is not trigger-happy. Not harsh, reactionary, easily exasperated. He is the most understanding person in the universe. The posture most natural to him is not a pointed finger but open arms" (p. 19).

1. And that is exactly what we see being put on display here. Here He is. Arms open wide. They will do their worst to Him, but they can't sin themselves outside His love.

E. This scene in Luke puts in stunning high definition the principle established back in Ezekiel: "As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek 33:11).

1. Jesus weeps because, contrary to all expectation, He still loves!

F. There are two ways we ought to apply this to ourselves . . .

1. First, we've got to ask if we really know this of Him. Have we let Jesus move in and love us like this? "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). "[W]hile we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son . . ." (Rom 5:10).

- a. His tears tell us two things at one and the same time. On the one hand they tell us our sin is no good, it's a big deal, we should take it seriously. But on the other hand they tell us that His heart is still soft to us, He still loves us, there's still a place for us in His arms.

- i. Do we know His love for us in this way? To quote Dane Ortlund again: "God is rich in mercy [and that] means that your regions of deepest shame and regret are not hotels through which divine mercy passes but homes in which divine mercy abides. It means the things about you that make you cringe most, make him hug hardest. It means his mercy is not calculating and

cautious, like ours. It is unrestrained, flood-like, sweeping, magnanimous. It means our haunting shame is not a problem for him, but the very thing he loves most to work with. It means our sins do not cause his love to take a hit. Our sins cause his love to surge forward all the more. It means on that day when we stand before him, quietly, unhurriedly, we will weep with relief, shocked at how impoverished a view of his mercy-rich heart we had” (179–80).

2. But second, we’ve got to ask if we’re loving others like this.
 - a. There is no room for this idea that we can know the love of God for us in Christ and then turn with hatred toward others, anyone, even the worst person you can think of right now. The Christian cannot drink from the deep wells of Christ’s grace and then turn and spit venom at another. It is an outright contradiction of the biblical ethic and goal. His love makes us loving.
 - i. So you can see how these two points are related. The only way you and I are going to make any headway in truly loving our enemies like Christ, is to experience His love for us in that way ourselves. Such love reforms our hearts.

(2) What His Weeping Doesn’t Mean

- A. Now, I can’t spend too much time on this, but there does need to be some clarifications made. I’ve got two . . .

Clarification #1: Though He Weeps . . . He Is Still Holy

- A. I know we’re always prone to extremes and rarely do we come into biblical balance.
 1. And so I’m aware that some may hear of Jesus as weeping in love even for sinners and wicked people and think: “Okay, so God is kind of like this cosmic pushover. He’s too soft to really come down hard anyone, right? Certainly all those old notions of judgment and wrath and things won’t stand up in the face of His love? He talks a big game, but at the end of the day, He’s going to relax the standards, right? He’s like one those parents who let their kids get away with all manner of things because they can’t bear the thought of disciplining them and seeing them sad or whatever.”
 - a. We think it’s an either/or situation. We have no concept of One who can be both gentle and lowly and firm and holy.
- B. But, in our text, Jesus—with compassion all but gushing forth from His heart, with tears literally streaming down His face—He goes right on to describe the judgment that’s coming for Israel from God. Indeed, that is part of the reason He’s crying, is it not? These people are en route to wrath and it pains Him.
 1. It’s as God revealed to Moses so many years prior. The Lord certainly is “⁶ a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,⁷ keeping

steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but [He] . . . will by no means clear the guilty . . ." (Exo 34:6-7).

- a. If we come to Him in humility and penitence He will forgive and help us change. But if we remain obstinate in our sin and rebellion, He will make a sure end of it.
 - i. He is reluctant to judge, He takes no pleasure in doing it, but still He must and He will. Though He weeps . . . He is still holy.
- C. So, in [Luke 19:43-44](#), Jesus speaks of a coming destruction that we know is fulfilled in 70 A.D. when the Roman army led by the future emperor Titus sieged Jerusalem and razed it all, including the temple, to the ground: "⁴³ For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side⁴⁴ and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."
- D. It's critical, I think, that the narrative here is ordered the way that it is by Luke. You see, Jesus is going to go on from here and enact this sort of judgment Himself in the temple, where we know he makes a whip of cords and begins driving out the people who had turned His Father's house into something like a concession stand.
 - 1. If all we saw was this, it would be easy to go off the rails on the other side, and begin thinking that Jesus is quick to anger and slow to mercy, He's all toughness and no tenderness.
 - a. But Luke takes care to make sure we see Him weep before we see Him with a whip. So that we know where His heart is in the matter. He loves, but He is holy and not to be trifled with.
- E. And that's really the meaning of the cross, isn't it? As it's been said, there mercy and justice kiss. We see in one and the same glance that God is remarkably merciful and kind, but that He is also unswervingly holy and just.
 - 1. Will You come to Him, find payment for your sin in His sacrifice and the power to change by His Spirit? Or will you stay, and die, in your sin?

Clarification #2: Though He Weeps . . . He Is Still Sovereign

- A. Here is yet another instance where we prone to think either/or when truly it is both/and. I think we may mistakenly read of our Savior weeping over Jerusalem here and find Him a bit pitiable, even pathetic, weak, helpless. He wishes it could be one thing, but alas it is another thing, and He is seemingly unable to do anything about it. He seems to be at the mercy of the whim and will of men.
 - 1. He appears to us something like a little schoolgirl who didn't get chosen for the prom, sulking at home on Friday night while all of her classmates are out at the dance. Poor Jesus.
- B. But that's not right, is it?

1. Jesus—pathetic? weak? helpless? Are you kidding me. In just a few days He is about to rip the fangs out of Satan, sin, and death. There is no more powerful Being in all the universe, than this Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.

- a. Oh no, make no mistake, though He weeps . . . He is still sovereign.

C. But, if that's the case, what's going on here?

1. If [John 6:44](#) says, “[n]o one can come to . . . [the Son] unless the Father . . . draws him” — why is the Father not drawing them?
2. If [Luke 10:22](#) says no one knows the Father except those “to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” — why is the Son not choosing to reveal?

- a. The short answer, it seems to me, is: They're up to something more. To put it more memorably perhaps: Sometimes God wills, that which He weeps over, because He is working towards something greater.

D. I get this idea really from the story in [John 11](#), where famously Jesus is said to actually have wept here as well. The shortest verse in all the Bible, as it's known: [John 11:35](#): “Jesus wept.”

1. But what occasioned this weeping do you remember? The death of his friend Lazarus.
2. And here's the thing, Jesus was told that Lazarus was ill days before. Mary and Martha had sent to Him requesting He come quickly and help. But here's what's curious about all this, [John 11:5-6](#): “⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.” What is that?! He could've come early and prevented the death, but instead He permits it . . . because He loves them?!
3. And then when He finally does arrive and He sees the great anguish of the family, and the horrors of death, He weeps over the very thing He, at least permissively, willed. Why?
4. Well, because He was working towards something greater.

- a. It was as He said back when He first heard the news of his friend's illness: “[This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it](#)” (v. 4).

- b. Or as He said to His disciples in [verses 14-15](#): “¹⁴ Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” And when He has them roll away that stone, and He calls Lazarus out, many believed (v. 45).

- i. Again, though He weeps . . . He is still sovereign.

E. And I think something like that is happening here in our text. He is permitting the hardness of heart, though it pains Him, because He is after more. Indeed, it is by way of their rejection that He actually becomes the Author of ours and their salvation.

1. The cross, so far as the history of the world is concerned, is at one and the same time the greatest act of human depravity and rebellion and the greatest act of divine kindness, mercy, and love.

- a. They drive nails through His veins and out flows a river of grace for their washing!
 - i. In [Romans 11](#) Paul talks about how Israel will come in droves back to Him through the Savior, only after so many Gentiles have come in as well.

F. It's a mystery. It's amazing. He is both lowly, gentle, soft . . . and sovereign!

So Come!

- A. So I hope you see it, what I said back at the beginning about God's love for you in Christ. And I hope you feel fresh courage to come, knowing as He says in [John 6:37](#): "[W]hoever comes to me I will never cast out."
 - 1. If you can summon your feet to step, if you can martial your courage to come forward, then, have no doubt, you shall find in your Savior open arms and an open lap. And while, as Revelation says, He will certainly wipe away every one of your tears, I wonder if you might turn up and pay Him the same courtesy—for He's been weeping too . . . for you!