

And God Wept

Good Friday
April 7, 2023
INI - SDG

John 11:32-37 ³² Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. ³⁴ And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" ³⁷ And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?"

Why does Jesus weep when he is about to raise Lazarus from the dead?

To the Jews it seemed perfectly natural. They did not know what Jesus was about to do. They took it as an expression of Jesus' love for a friend that he had lost, which is of course the normal human response to death.

But to us who know what Jesus was about to do it may seem odd. This is only because we see from an earthly perspective. When we weep at a funeral, we are sad because someone we love is gone, in other words we are sad because of the result of death.

God sees things differently. He does not weep over the result of death but over the fact of death. He weeps over man's sins. He weeps over what has happened to those whom He created in His image, those whom He loves.

The other week I ran across an article in which a woman describes how when she was a young girl she woke up to find it raining outside. The night before she had gotten in trouble and she was afraid that the rain was God crying because of what she had done.

This little girl's father correctly reassured her that the rain was not God crying. The rain was a blessing from God. He was watering the earth so that fruits and vegetables and every good thing could grow for us to eat.

Nevertheless, it is certainly true that God does weep over man's sins.

In Psalm 78:40 the Psalmist describes how God's heart was broken when the children of Israel rebelled against Him time and time again in the wilderness.

Psalm 78:40 How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, And grieved Him in the desert!

The word which here is translated "grieve" means to deeply wound. In Genesis 3:16 it is the word that God uses to describe the pain of childbirth. In Job 10:8 it is translated as "destroy."

God is stabbed in the heart. He is heartbroken over the sin of His people.

In Isa 22:4 God himself expresses His anguish over the sins of his people.

Isa 22:4 Therefore I said, "Look away from me, I will weep bitterly; Do not labor to comfort me Because of the plundering of the daughter of my people."

Here God refers not directly to the sins but to the result of those sins. He says the same thing through the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 14:17 Let my eyes flow with tears night and day, And let them not cease; For the virgin daughter of my people Has been broken with a mighty stroke, with a very severe blow.

God himself is the one who allowed the destruction of Jerusalem. He sent this as a punishment for the people because of their sin. He did it to preserve them from their sin. He allowed this punishment that He might keep a remnant alive, and through that remnant bring forth Jesus who is the Christ.

Yet even as He sends the punishment upon his people, even as He does what must be done, still His heart is broken. The tears flow over what has become of His people.

John 11:35 "Jesus wept."

This verse is often used as proof that Jesus was true man. This is true so far as the physical act of crying is concerned. God cannot literally cry. But we are badly mistaken if we think the emotion itself is only a human reaction.

Faced to face with death, the bitter consequence of man's sin, it the divine Christ who weeps. Not over the consequences of death but over the fact of death and the sin of man which causes it.

Jesus stands here as the divine man, the God who became flesh. As God He is cut to the heart, as man the emotion is expressed with physical tears.

Jesus weeps as the God who hates sin and has come to earth to destroy both it and its effect on us. He weeps for men who must suffer and die because of our sin. He weeps for the unbelief of those who stand around Him. He weeps as the Good Shepherd for His lost sheep.

But he does not stop with the weeping. He came to do something about it. He came to the tomb of Lazarus to do battle with death. He calls out with the voice of God and death is vanquished. As we heard two weeks ago He calls out with the voice of God and the lost are found.

Just as He grieved over the death of Lazarus and then came to the tomb to give life, just so God grieved at the death of all men and then came to give life, to call the lost out of death.

In Genesis 6:6 the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

The people of Noah's day were certainly not sorry or grieved by what they had done. They bragged and reveled in their sinfulness. It was God who wept over their sin.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday he wept over the city.

Luke 19:41 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it,

The people of Jerusalem were not troubled by their sin but God in the person of Jesus Christ weeps over what they had become, their unbelief, their sinfulness. He weeps over what will happen to them because of their stubbornness.

When the crowd sees Jesus weeping at the tomb of Lazarus they respond "See how He loved him!"

Of course, they were right. It was love that caused Jesus to weep at the death of Lazarus. It was love that caused God to be sorry that He had created man. It was love which opened His heart to be grieved by the children of Israel. It was love that caused him to do something about it, to come in the form of man and die for the people who had abandoned Him by their sin and brought death upon themselves.

Although they do not correctly understand the reason, nevertheless they are right about the motivation. It was because the incarnate God, the man Christ Jesus loved Lazarus that he wept. He wept over his death, not over the consequences of that death but over the simple fact of that death.

But even while God himself was cut to the heart, He did not only weep. He became man and went to the cross in order to redeem us who had become so much darkness. It was His love which caused Him to weep and His love which caused Him to come and die for our sins.

The death of Christ is the result of our sin not His. Love caused Jesus to weep at the tomb of Lazarus. Love sent Him to that tomb to give life. In love God weeps over our sin. In love God came to give us life.