

## THE TEARS OF JESUS

Solomon once said, "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under Heaven...a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Humans probably have no greater expression than tears: our deepest sorrows and our highest joys seem to find their fullest meaning in our tears. There are three recorded occasions when the Bible speaks of Jesus shedding tears: before the grave of Lazarus, before the doomed city of Jerusalem, and before His crucifixion.

In this essay let's answer the questions, "What was there in these occasions which could have driven God to tears? And what can we learn from these occasion?"

### Jesus shed tears of compassion.

By "compassion" I mean as Webster said, a "sympathetic consciousness of the distress of others together with a desire to alleviate it." Please read John 11:1-5, 11-14, 17-21, and 32-36.

**Christ's tears of compassion demonstrated His love for the sorrowful** (John 11:33). The word "weep" here simply means "to shed tears, to weep silently" (Vincent). Robertson said that although "This is the shortest verse in the Bible...no verse carries more meaning." A scholar named Godet wrote, "The very Gospel in which the deity of Jesus is most clearly asserted, is also that which makes us best acquainted with the profoundly human side of His life."

How different Jesus is from idol gods and goddesses—the gods of men. The gods of Homer wept and bellowed when wounded, but weren't touched with the feeling of human infirmity: "The gods ordain the lot of man to suffer, while they themselves are free from care" (Illiad 24:525). The goddess Diana, when appealed to by Hippolytus for sympathy, replied, "I see thy love, but must not shed a tear" (Hippolytus, Euripides, 1396). A scholar named Gladstone wrote, "The gods, while they dispense afflictions upon Earth, which are neither sweetened by love, nor elevated by a distinct disciplinary purpose, take care to keep themselves beyond all touch of grief or care." However, the true God, God the Son, shed tears of compassion; as Paul wrote, "Weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15). Jesus again set the example so that we could follow in His steps (First Peter 2:21).

We may stand in awe at God who can raise the dead, but we still bow in worship to God whose deep concern for us brings tears to His eyes! For example, usually when Jesus is referred to in Heaven after His resurrection He is "sitting" at the right hand of God, but when Stephen sees Him while he's being stone to death in Acts 7:56, he sees Jesus "standing" at the right hand of God. Why? The obvious answer is that this demonstrates Christ's profound love for His people.

**Christ's tears of compassion demonstrated glory to His Father** (John 11:4, 40, & 44). It was Christ's life-work to glorify His Father: in His prayer to God in John 17:4 He said, "I have glorified You on the earth...." Every word He spoke expressed the wisdom of God. Every person he healed demonstrated the goodness of God. Every person he fed revealed the providence of God. Word by word, deed by deed, and day by day Jesus disclosed more and more of God's character to a world which did not understand or know Him. So when He spoke people, such as the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well (John 4:19), perceived Him to be a prophet. When He healed the sick (Luke 7:16) and when He raised the dead (John 11:40) people glorified God.

The tears of Jesus glorified God because they manifested to man how much God really does care for us: Peter admonished, "Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (First Peter 5:7). Further, through the tears of Jesus we come to love God because we see in Him a God worthy of our love: John said, "We love Him because He first loved us" (First John 4:19).

**Jesus shed tears of grief.** Please read Luke 19:41-44.

**Christ's tears of grief demonstrated his love for the rebellious.** For three years Jesus had preached repentance and God's approaching kingdom to the Jews; because His people had rejected

Him and wanted to kill Him, He had to avoid Jerusalem or steal into secrecy. The tears Jesus shed over Jerusalem weren't simply quiet tears of compassion as He shed in Bethany at the grave of Lazarus, but the original word here means "to weep audibly, to cry as a child" (Thayer); it includes deep and loud, emotional sobs of distress. But why the difference? There must have been at least two thoughts in Christ's mind concerning the Jews.

1. *The Jews were about to reject their own Messiah.* For centuries they had waited, longingly expecting the Messiah to come and deliver them. They endured captivities and oppressions in hope the kingdom of God would soon be established, but they were carnal, seeking a Messiah of military and political strength. They wanted God's kingdom to come, but they wanted the throne to be in Jerusalem, not Heaven. So for three years, as Jesus taught concerning the kingdom of God, "they saw, but they did not perceive; they heard, but they did not understand" (Matthew 13:13).
2. *He wept over Jerusalem because He could clearly see their impending destruction, the slaughter of God's people by the army of Titus.* As He gazed on Jerusalem that day, He foresaw a city surrounded by the Romans. He saw the hunger, the pain, and the death of what some historians consider to be the most cruel holocaust in human history. Then He watched as the last of the Jews fled their ruined city to return no more. For this He wept, not tears of compassion so much as tears of grief. Later Jesus taught His disciples privately of the destruction of Jerusalem so that, through diligence, they may escape it without harm. (See Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 17, & Luke 21.)

A few days earlier, Mary and Martha had wept over one very dear to them; now Jesus was mourning the certain death of those so dear to Him: to the city Jesus said, "'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate'" (Matthew 23:37-38). Why did Jesus weep? He wept because of the sin of unbelief. It was unbelief which sent Him to the cross, it was unbelief which brought Jerusalem's destruction. What a destructive force is the sin of unbelief!

**Christ's tears of grief demonstrated His love for us as well as the Jews.** Today He weeps for those who don't believe, because we're just as important to Him as the children of Jerusalem. He grieves over us when we reject Him, when we refuse His message, His sacrifice, and His invitation. When we refuse to follow Him, are we doing anything less than the Jews of His day? When we refuse His invitation, aren't we also carnally minded and worthy of death? When we choose our own messiahs like our plans, careers, wealth, and fame, aren't we just like those Jews? My Messiah has come; before I came to Him, He wept over me and still weeps for those who reject Him. Jesus mourns for us because He sees our end, just like He saw the end of the rebellious Jews; to reject Him, whether we're first century Jews or twentieth century Americans, brings the same end—God's wrath: John the Baptist said, "'He who believes in the Son has everlasting life, and he who does not believe in the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him'" (John 3:36).

Do we want to see what Jesus sees? Could we stand the picture of destruction which awaits those who reject Him? If we saw our fates in Hell, would we not weep, too? It's been said that once a boy had a cat that kept walking around his ankles and meowing as he slowly ate a meal his mother had prepared. Suddenly, the boy picked up the cat and placed him on the table. The mother yelled, "Put that cat on the floor. Why would you do such a thing anyway?" The boy answered, "Well, I thought that if he could see what we were having, he wouldn't want it so badly." Perhaps if we could see our fates, we wouldn't want it so badly either. But there's hope for us: as long as we have life, our destiny isn't sealed.

See, that which really drives God the Son to tears is to know that we don't have to end up in Hell; He didn't come to condemn, but to save. It breaks His heart that we could die in unbelief and disobedience to suffer what we could avoid. The tears of Jesus fall for many today.

**Jesus shed tears of struggle.** Please read Hebrews 5:5-9.

**Christ's tears of struggle demonstrate that He was tempted just like we are.** Paul wrote, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all point tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:14-16). Albert Barnes wrote this concerning verse 15: "Our High Priest is not cold and unfeeling. That is, we have One who is abundantly qualified to sympathize with us in our afflictions, and to whom, therefore, we may look for aid and support in trials. Had we a high priest who was cold and heartless, who simply performed the external duties of his office, without entering into the sympathies of those who came to seek for pardon, who had never experienced any trials and who felt himself above those who sought his aid, we should necessarily feel disheartened in attempting to overcome our sins and live to God. His coldness would repel us; his statliness would awe us; his distance and reserve would keep us away and perhaps render us indifferent to all desire to be saved.... But tenderness and sympathy attract those who are feeble, and kindness does more than anything else to encourage those who have to encounter difficulties and dangers."

John wrote, "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father, but is of the world" (First John 2:16). Jesus, being a man who wanted to be our "abundantly qualified" High Priest, subjected Himself to these temptations, the same ones we suffer through each day. Read Matthew 4:1-11. Concerning the lust of the flesh, Satan personally tempted Jesus to turn a stone into bread (verses 3-4). Concerning the lust of the eyes, Satan personally tempted Him with all the world's kingdoms (verses 8-10). Concerning the pride of life, Satan personally tempted Him to jump from the top of the temple (verses 5-7).

**Christ's tears of struggle demonstrated the seriousness of sin.** Notice, these were tears of struggle, struggle due to the temptation of sin: He was tempted to avoid going to the cross; He hoped that there was another way that the scheme of redemption could be fulfilled. Hebrews 5:7 again says that Jesus, "in the days of His flesh...offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear." (See Luke 22:41-44.) How strong has been our resistance to sin? When was the last time we spent a night in prayer? When was the last time we sweat blood? When was the last time we wept tears in a struggle with sin?

Sin is a serious matter: it's our sin which crucified Jesus! Remember First Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man, but God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it." When it appeared to get to the point where Jesus could bear it no more, God sent an angel to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43), and I believe He will do the same for us.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus shed many tears during His earthly ministry. He shed tears of compassion, demonstrating His love for His disciples. He shed tears of grief, demonstrating His love for the sinner. He shed tears of struggle, demonstrating the seriousness of sin. In short, the tears of Jesus glorify God the Father by showing how much He cares for all mankind. Our sorrows move God to tears. Our unbelief moves Him to grief. Our struggles move Him to weep.

Hebrews 4:15 reads, "We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." Matthew Henry wrote this concerning this verse: "Though He is great, and so far above us, yet He is very kind, and tenderly concerned for us. He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities in such a manner as none else can be, for He was Himself tried with all the afflictions and troubles that are incident to our nature in its fallen state, and this not only that He might be able to satisfy for us, but to sympathize with us." End this study by reading Hebrews 2:14-18.

[Adapted/Revised by Tony Denton, July 1993.  
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