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## **Forgive Me, Lord, for Making You Weep**

**By David Wilkerson**

July 31, 2006 Luke 19 gives us a powerful picture of Jesus making his final entry into Jerusalem. The image is of Christ approaching the city on a donkey to shouts of praise from great throngs. He started at the Mount of Olives, and the closer he got to the city gate the larger the crowds grew. Soon the people were casting down their garments before him, waving palm branches and crying, "He's here! The hour has come for the king of Israel to arrive. Peace has come to Jerusalem. Finally, the kingdom is here!"

Why was there such rejoicing, such loud hosannas? "Because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (Luke 19:11). In the people's minds, Jesus heralded the arrival of God's promised "kingdom on earth."

Yet this didn't mean they trusted him as their Messiah. Their only thought was that God's reign had begun: "Goodbye, Roman rule! There will be no more wars, because our king will rise up with a sword and cut down every enemy. We're going to see peace in Jerusalem and in Israel, with no more bondage, no more food shortages. God has finally sent his expected king."

No one on the scene that day expected what would happen next. As Jesus came down the mount and the multitudes shouted his praises, he looked out over Jerusalem — and he broke down weeping. "When he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it" (Luke 19:41). Here was God himself in flesh, weeping!

A weeping God is inconceivable to an unbelieving world. The concept of a weeping God is despicable to the minds of the wicked: "God crying? Why would anyone want a deity that shows weakness?"

Yet weeping is exactly what Jesus did here. The reason for his tears? *It was the people's blatant unbelief.* You may think, "But these crowds were singing praises to him, shouting hosannas. That doesn't sound like unbelief to me." Yet Scripture tells us Jesus knew what was in men's hearts. And the fact is, these same crowds would be hardened with murderous unbelief toward him in just a short time.

It was at this incredible moment in Israel's history that Jesus cried out in anguish over the people's hardness: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37).

Remember, these were the same multitudes who had seen Jesus do incredible works in their midst. Blind eyes were opened, deaf ears could hear, the crippled walked, the dead were raised — and the crowds had witnessed it all. Yet, in spite of such living proof of every Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah — in spite of the prophetic words these crowds supposedly hallowed — they would harden their hearts in unbelief.

Jesus was saying to these people, in essence, "I gave you miracles, signs, wonders. I met your needs, healed your illnesses and fed you miraculously. I've given you every example of love the Father represents. But you have rejected that love."

As Jesus looked out over the city, he foresaw the awful cost of such hardness of heart. Yet he wasn't willing that a single person among those crowds should perish. He loved them still, and we hear that

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love in his tearful words: “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate” (Matthew 23:38).

Indeed, Jesus saw the payday of unbelief coming. And he prophesied to that crowd, “The days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave one stone upon another; *because thou knewest not the time of the thy visitation*” (Luke 19:43–44, my italics).

Christ knew that in about seventy years’ time, the Roman general Titus would invade Jerusalem and raze the city to the ground. Its mighty walls would topple and the temple would be destroyed, terrorizing the nation. What a horrible payday Israel was going to see for its blatant rejection of God’s love.

Yet the same issue of unbelief remains today: How does Jesus feel about all the hardness and venom directed toward him in these times? There is a worldwide attitude of rebellion and blasphemy that says, “We will not be put under any of God’s rule.” I know what I personally feel over this attitude: deep sorrow mixed with anger. I continually ask the Lord, “How can the world get away with mocking you so terribly, for so long?”

It causes me to wonder: as Jesus wept over Jerusalem, was he also feeling wounds from the hardened world to come? Did he foresee that the vast population of the earth would still be mocking his name two millennia later? Did he also feel wounds from future believers, who would still be rejecting him in centuries to come? Were the tears he shed in part over all the judgments that were to come as a result of unbelief?

Think of how powerfully his gospel has gone forth over the centuries. Thousands upon thousands of ministers and missionaries now preach Christ throughout the world. Multitudes of charitable organizations do endless works of compassion in his name. And many unsung people stand as witnesses of his love amid terrible persecution worldwide. Yet for much of the church of Jesus Christ, faith is a one-time, one-crisis phenomenon. Whenever their next crisis comes — a trial with much more intensity — their faith wavers, and doubts roll in.

We’re told throughout the Psalms and other wisdom writings that we have a God who laughs, weeps, grieves, whose anger can be stirred. Likewise, the New Testament tells us we have a high priest in heaven who is touched by the feelings of our infirmities; the same flesh-and-blood man who was God on earth is now a glorified man in eternity.

Without question, our Lord is a God who feels. And I have to wonder: how can Jesus not be wounded by the great unbelief taking place throughout the world today?

How often does the church today wound the Lord by our unbelief? Think of the unbelief of the disciples in the boat with Jesus, as it began to flood from the roiling waves. How wounded Jesus must have been as they aimed these accusing, unbelieving words at him: “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:38).

What about the times when Jesus miraculously fed crowds of 5,000 and later 4,000 people with only a few fish and bread loaves? Twice he wrought this miracle food, feeding a total of 9,000 men, not including the women and children on those scenes. Yet even after these incredible works, Jesus’ own disciples were still mired in unbelief. After one such miracle feeding, Christ spoke to them about the

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leaven of the Pharisees, and “they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread” (8:16).

Jesus must have been shocked at their words. He had just miraculously multiplied bread for the masses, before his disciples’ own eyes. Clearly he was wounded as he replied to them, “Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? And having ears, hear ye not? And do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets of fragments took ye up?... How is it that ye do not understand?” (8:17–19, 21).

Did Jesus have to wipe a tear from his eye in that moment? Was he weeping over their unbelief when they’d just seen him do the impossible? Did he cry because he realized that, in spite of his miracle-working love, they still didn’t trust in him?

What about after the Resurrection, when Jesus appeared alongside the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? Remember how downcast those two were, when they still hadn’t realized who was walking with them? Jesus asked what troubled them, and they answered, “Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?...

“We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel... And certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher [after the Crucifixion]; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us [the disciples] went to the sepulcher, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not” (Luke 24:18, 21, 23–24).

In short, when the disciples didn’t find Jesus at the tomb, they no longer believed. And they dismissed the testimony of the women who had brought them the angel’s report of the Resurrection.

How wounding this had to be to Jesus! Even the church in his own day didn’t believe in his resurrection. It was then, on the road to Emmaus with the two unbelieving disciples, that Jesus let loose this rebuke: “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (24:25–26).

His own followers had neither remembered nor believed the words he’d foretold them about his death, burial and resurrection. We see the same wounded reaction in Christ when he appeared to the whole group: “Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen” (Mark 16:14). The word “upbraided” here means to reprove.

Some readers may wonder why our gentle, compassionate Lord spoke so strongly to his disciples. Yet these Gospel accounts make it abundantly clear: Christ was deeply affected by their unbelief. These men were his closest friends, his inner circle, the ones he’d handpicked to serve as pillars of his church. Yet evidently, when Jesus entered the upper room, he heard them talking as if there were no resurrection, no living Christ — and their hardness of heart brought him to tears.

There are no wounds so hurtful as those inflicted by our nearest and dearest friends. The deepest wounds come from our inner circles: the people closest to us, those most intimate with our hearts, friends in whom we have put our trust.

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When I think of those who promote the “Da Vinci Code” and “The Judas Gospel”...who try to legislate God out of our society...who mock and curse Christ...I realize none of these can wound our Lord and Savior. Such wicked ones’ unbelief and hardness are to be expected. Jesus himself said, “The children of the devil do what their father tells them to do.” Their actions are simply evidence of directions from hell. I do thank God for every defender of the faith who calmly takes up the pen to expose Satan’s lies.

It is the unbelief of multitudes of apathetic churchgoing believers that wounds our Lord. How it must pain him to see his people praising him, testifying of his goodness and power, preaching moving sermons on faith — yet God knows it’s only lip service. In times of crisis, many of these same people fall away from their faith, thinking God doesn’t care.

Yet even these aren’t the people who wound Jesus most deeply. His deepest hurts are inflicted by his closest, most intimate friends. We know from Scripture that God is no respecter of persons, meaning he shows no favoritism when it comes to salvation; all are saved by faith alone. Yet Christ did have an inner circle of close friends, people he especially trusted. In fact, we see human friendship with God in both Testaments: when the Lord called Abraham his “friend”... when Moses was chosen to talk with the Lord face to face...and throughout the Gospels.

Who did Jesus have in his inner circle? The gospel writers say again and again that Christ’s circle was comprised of Peter, James and John. These were the only ones Jesus took with him when he raised a young girl from the dead. They were also with Christ during that glorious moment on the Mount of Transfiguration. And these three were the last disciples with Jesus at Gethsemane, when he asked them to keep watch and pray. Clearly, here was an inner circle of friends that was close to the Lord.

Yet at Bethany, Jesus had an even more intimate circle. This one was made up of Martha, Mary and their brother, Lazarus. The siblings’ home served as Jesus’ retreat away from the pressing crowds, with Martha cooking meals, Mary a devoted convert, and Lazarus a dear friend in whom Jesus could confide. John’s gospel states plainly, “Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus” (John 11:5).

Here was a home where Jesus was trusted, where he could sit back and relax, where he could be fully at rest. The three siblings were like family to him, and their story is a familiar one. Lazarus grew seriously sick, and the sisters sent an urgent message to Jesus: “Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.” But Christ waited until Lazarus died before he went to them. Why? “He said, this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby” (11:3–4).

We know Jesus could have simply spoken a word and Lazarus would have been healed. Likewise, the Lord could have gone to Lazarus on his sickbed and healed him there. Instead, Christ said, “I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him” (11:15).

It is one thing to believe for the healing of a sick man, and another to believe a dead man can be brought back to life. In this scene, Jesus was setting up an opportunity for his inner circle of friends to believe for what was absolutely impossible. He was saying to Martha and Mary, in essence, “I’m glad I wasn’t there when things looked bad. And I’m glad I didn’t act sooner. I have allowed this situation to go beyond all possibility, all human hope, because I want you to behold my resurrection power.”

Jesus was about to prove himself as the God of all impossibilities. This encounter wasn’t so much about Lazarus’ death as it was about Christ’s own death. Think about it: when the time came for Jesus

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to face the cross, how would his followers ever believe he could be raised up? There was only one way they would believe it. And that was for Jesus — there, in Bethany, with his beloved friends — to enter the most hopeless situation and work his purposes in the face of the humanly impossible.

I'm convinced Jesus would not have entrusted this experience to anyone outside his inner circle. Such things were reserved for those who were intimate with him, who didn't think as the world thinks. You see, it is only in such friends — people who know Christ's heart and trust him fully — that he can produce a faith which can't be shaken.

The fact is, Jesus knew all the future hardships that would take place in these dear ones' lives. He knew every illness and tragedy they would face. He also knew the destruction that was to come upon Jerusalem. And he wanted to see in them now a faith that would believe in his care no matter what calamity they faced. He knew this was the only thing that could get them through what was to come.

When Jesus finally arrived, Martha's first words to him were, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." These words may sound full of faith on Martha's part. But when Jesus responded, "Thy brother shall rise again," Martha's answer was revealing: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." In other words: "It's all over for now, Jesus. You're too late."

Jesus replied: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (11:21-22, 23-24, 25-26).

Christ was telling her, in other words, "No, Martha, I am the resurrection and the life. Believe in me, and you'll never die." Again, he wasn't just talking about Lazarus, but about his own death and resurrection. To him, Lazarus' raising was already a settled matter: "Martha, don't you believe I can go *even into the grave* and do the impossible for you and Mary, all of your days?"

At that point, Martha "went her way" (11:28). And that's what most of us do in such situations. We don't settle the issue with Jesus, seeking him in faith, "Oh, Lord, help my unbelief." Instead, we simply walk away, back to our doubts and fears. And that wounds the Lord. Evidently, Martha didn't understand that Jesus wanted more from her than faith for just this one crisis. Christ wanted her to stop *all* her unbelieving tendencies, and to begin a lifelong trust in him that would see her through every trial.

Jesus then called for Mary. "When Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Even devout Mary said the same thing to Jesus that her sister did. What was his reaction? "He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled" (11: 32, 33).

Martha's unbelief must have been wounding enough to him. I'm convinced Jesus expected more from Mary. But as he watched her weeping pitifully, with no hope, he "groaned" — a word that means "indignation." Likewise, the word for "troubled" means "displeased."

It was then Jesus said, "Where have ye laid him?" (11:34). As Martha heard him command the stone to be rolled away, she protested, "But, Lord, all you'll get is a stench. Our brother has been dead for four days." Here was yet more unbelief. That's when we read: "Jesus wept" (11:35).

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Entire commentaries have been written about this verse, with many interpretations. There must be a thousand definitions describing reasons why Jesus wept. But for me, this passage has become a personal one. As I meditated on it, I prayed, "Lord, I don't want to know what some doctrine says. I want to feel what you felt."

Jesus tells us to weep with those who weep, and he may have wept over the sorrow taking place around him that day. But the fact is, Jesus already knew Lazarus soon would walk out of the grave. So his tears had to be over something else, too.

Hebrews tells us, "With whom was (God) grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned... *them that believed not?*" (Hebrews 3:17, 18, my italics). As I go back to the scene at Lazarus' grave, I begin to feel something of Jesus' wounded heart. Think about it: it seems no one in all the earth at that moment was believing Christ fully. The Jews didn't accept him. Even the pillars of his church disbelieved. Now his inner circle of friends showed no faith. Jesus knew he was going to be leaving the earth soon, so what must he have felt in that moment?

Now I must ask you: are things any different today? Who in this world believes Jesus is God of the impossible? When the Son of man looks on the earth, does he find faith?

Recently I was taking a "prayer walk," with concerns about the health of several family members. As I thought about this Scripture passage, I suddenly found myself praying through tears: "Lord, they made you cry. Have I also made you cry, by my unbelief? I've had precious times with you for over fifty years, Jesus. I love you, and I know you love me. But lately I've harbored some doubts. I've wondered why some prayers have not yet been answered."

Since then, I have heard his sweet, still voice, saying, "I will always love you, David. I will keep you from falling, and I will be faithful to present you faultless before the Father. But, yes, I am wounded by your times of unbelief and wavering faith."

So, dear saint: are you in the middle of an overwhelming trial right now? Have you prayed, wept and pleaded for help, yet things look hopeless? Maybe your situation has gone beyond all human possibility, and you're thinking, "It's too late."

I tell you, you have been entrusted with your crisis. God could have moved in at any time, but this is his opportunity to produce in you an unwavering faith that you need. He's looking for trust in him not just for what you're facing now, but for every impossible problem from now until you go home to be with him. Make no mistake: he rejoices over you. Yet he also loves you enough to build a faith in you that will see you through it all.

Pray with me: "Forgive me, Lord, for making you weep. Help my unbelief now." Then make this verse your own: "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

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