

## THE HEALTHY SOUL, PART 2: TEARS

Luke 7:36-50, 19:41-44 (NASB)

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Years ago I was working at the computer in my office when I found myself weeping so hard that the tears made a splatting sound as they hit my keyboard. I was writing my weekly sermon, seeking to encourage the church to reach out to unreached generations. I was constructing what some preachers call a window, which is like an illustration only smaller. I planned to say just a few sentences on how Jesus Christ would have gone to the video game parlors of that day to encounter a generation of teenagers.

I had typed only a few words when my soul was overcome with emotion. I saw a picture in my head of the Lord speaking to the young in their language and preferred gathering place. The picture shifted and I saw the face of a single teenager from our church in my mind, representing not an individual but an entire generation of those who needed to meet Christ. I assumed the giant tears splatting off my keyboard would stop in a moment, but they did not. I made an effort to stop weeping, which worked for a bit and then failed. So I rolled my typing chair back from the keyboard to keep from ruining it, leaned over, and the tears began splatting even louder on the plastic roller mat for my chair. This went on for some minutes. I just waited and eventually they stopped.

There was nothing wrong with me, my church, or my family at the time. Everything was fine--except that people who were beloved by God were not yet reached with the good news of Jesus Christ. It finally occurred to me that God had given me a personal experience of how he feels about those who do not yet know him. It also showed me that the emotional nature of the healthy soul should be fully engaged in the work of Christ and life in general. We will treat other facets of the emotions of the soul in future studies, but this study will focus on the role of tears.

### GLAD TEARS

Some tears of the healthy soul are from gladness, which can have many specific sources. Christ had an encounter with some Pharisees who had invited Jesus to dinner to give him "what for." Luke records: "**And there was a woman in the city who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster vial of perfume, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume**" (Luke 7:37-38). Of course, the Pharisees delivered a stinging condemnation to Christ over his acceptance of the sinner woman and her ministry to him: *A known sinner! How dare he!*

Have you had encounters with people like the Pharisees? Do your best to keep them from disturbing your soul. There will always be self-righteous people to condemn us for everything. But why did this woman display such powerful emotions toward Jesus? First, she took an unthinkably expensive jar of perfume and began washing his feet with the contents and her tears, even kissing his feet. These would have to have been some very large tears to be of any use in washing someone's feet!

I think the depth of her emotion embarrasses us. We think: *Surely she must have been some kind of emotional wreck.*

Maybe. But listen to the things for which she was crying glad tears of thankfulness, as Luke continues the story: **"Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.' And Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' And he replied, 'Say it, Teacher.' 'A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said to him, 'You have judged correctly'"** (Luke 7:39-43).

First, the woman was unspeakably grateful for the forgiveness of her many sins, which apparently were widely known. The fact that Jesus used this mini-parable to explain the woman's emotion means that she must have had some encounter with Christ before this. If she was not already aware of her forgiveness she could not yet have been weeping with love for the Christ who had forgiven her. Weeping over sin and shedding glad tears for the forgiveness of them is a clear mark of revival taking place among God's people. Although our sins may not be as public as this sinner woman, we have the exact same need for forgiveness--no more, no less. I have been wondering lately if our nation is in a drought of revival tears. Whatever our personal experience may be, tears for that reason are normal for those who encounter Christ.

Luke continued the story: **"Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.' Then He said to her, 'Your sins have been forgiven.' Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this man who even forgives sins?' And He said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'"** (Luke 7:44-50).

As I say, I don't think this was the first time the woman had heard that her faith had saved her. We see here three additional reasons for tears. Jesus said that **"she loved much."** Her love for her Savior, who was unlike any man she had ever met, knew no bounds. Her tears were also for her redemption. Finally, I think the Lord touched this woman's deepest brokenness of soul. Imagine how smashed her heart would have been in light of her profession, which was to give her precious self to heartless men who used her and threw her away. By contrast, Jesus' love for her was intensely real and it broke her heart. He treated her as we should treat all people, as having worth because of the image of God within her. Her life of immorality, which may have been partly motivated by low self esteem, drove her self esteem as far down as it could go. And then Jesus loved her, spoke to her, forgave her, and valued her. As a result, she shed glad tears of love, tears of redemption, and tears of emotional healing.

Her tears were, for many reasons, the proper response of a healthy soul. Think how unhealthy it would have been for her to be an emotional blank in the face of the tender love of Christ, forgiveness of

her sin, and her first taste of respect after a lifetime of scorn. It was the Pharisees who had unhealthy souls in spite of their dedication to religious observances. They understood none of this. It was a complete blank to them.

It is important to note that not everyone in the New Testament whose conversion stories are told actually shed tears. The point is that the soul needs to have a healthy response to this life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ moved heaven and earth to save us, and if that fact does not move our souls there is something wrong. Check yourself on this. You should not be an emotional blank about Christ.

By the same token, different people have different levels of demonstrativeness. There are at least two dangers to avoid. The naturally reserved person needs to be honest before God that they are not using their natural quiet spirit as a comfortable cover to avoid facing the depth of God's work in the soul. As Jesus told the Pharisee, if you do not think you are much of a sinner you will not be very moved by the love and forgiveness of God. On the other hand, naturally demonstrative people need to know that having and expressing strong feelings does not automatically mean that they have allowed God to do a deep work within them. If we are open to God and honest with ourselves we will be deeply moved by the love, forgiveness, and grace of Jesus Christ toward us.

## SAD TEARS

By contrast to glad tears, Jesus Christ is our example for the sad tears of a healthy soul. Another account in Luke's gospel tells this story: "**When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation'"** (Luke 19:41-44).

What greater reason for weeping could there be than for the Savior to know that he would give his life to bring atonement for sin and eternal life to those whom he loved, and that most of them would not receive it? Jesus wept at the hardness of heart of those to whom he had already presented the way to salvation. He wept, as the Knower of All Things, at the coming destruction of Jerusalem. This is a crucial point. Christ takes no pleasure in the destruction of those who reject him, as Ezekiel was instructed to prophesy to Israel in his day: "**Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'"** (Ezekiel 33:11). God is Judge of All the Earth, but, unlike any judge we have ever met, he is the Weeping Judge.

God grieves over the lost but rejoices over those who believe in him, as Luke recorded: "**What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 'I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance'"** (Luke 15:4-7). The tears of Christ over a

lost Jerusalem are the mirror image of his joy over the reclamation of lost people. A joy desired and denied becomes a sorrow, and the greater the joy denied, the greater the sorrow.

Christ also wept great tears in the Garden of Gethsemane, as the writer to the Hebrews noted: **"In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety"** (Hebrews 5:7). Some sad tears are over the personal sorrows we must face. Part of the reason Christ wept in the Garden of Gethsemane was for the agony of his own coming crucifixion. And let us remember that the spiritual work of bearing our sins and the punishment for them was an infinitely greater sorrow than a mere beating of his flesh. So, if Christ is our example of a healthy soul, sad tears can be appropriate for both our own sorrows and the sorrows of others.

## THE HEALTHY SOUL RESONATES WITH GOD

The general principle of the emotions of a healthy soul can be illustrated by a piano striking its strings. All strings on a piano are muted by default with a felt. If you press the sustain pedal, the felts lift and all of the strings are unmuted. If you then strike a magnificent chord and listen closely, you will discover that strings which you did not play are quietly resonating along with the notes in your chord. The heart passions of the God who was revealed by the tears and rejoicing of Christ are that magnificent chord, and if our souls are attuned to him we shall resonate in concert with him.

I think this explains the meaning of something Paul the Apostle said to the Ephesian elders when he was leaving them for the last time: **"Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears"** (Acts 20:31). Why were tears associated with teaching? There may have been several reasons, but one of them was surely that Paul had deep emotions affirming that the things he was teaching were the great things of God, the things which make life on earth matter. I can attest to deep emotion arising from teaching the truths of God. Paul knew that the future of the church which he loved depended on those very truths. The greatest blessings and sorrows were the consequences related to those truths. I have been unable to speak at times when preaching about a mother's love for her children, about fathers teaching their sons to be men, and about the heart of God for the salvation of the lost. As strongly as we may resonate with the passions of God, it is only a sympathetic vibration in tune with his magnificent heart.

By contrast, the heart of the unhealthy soul is disconnected from God and ungoverned by divine truth. The passions of God are alien to it. As you may be struggling to speak over the powerful emotions within you, others whose souls have not been transformed by the Holy Spirit stare back with blank expressions. They wonder what is wrong with you. Once, early in my ministry, I was preaching on the subject of those who are locked in a fight to keep on believing. Many people struggle with their faith, and God gave me, as I was speaking, a heart of compassion for them--which caused me to get choked up. Afterward someone came up to me to ask if there was something wrong with me. No, actually, there was something very right.

I won't lie to you. God's heart feels deeply, so if you resonate with him, you will feel deeply, too. The only way to avoid that is to become so callous that nothing penetrates your defenses. Then you've lost it all anyway, because the callous soul knows little of the heart of God. I appeal to you: Don't give up caring about the things God cares about even if it steals your breath from time to time! He

saved you in order for you to be close to him, and if you erect blast shields around your heart you can never be close to him. Paul had this goal: "**...That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings...**" (Philippians 3:10). The healthy soul has the capacity to weep when God weeps. It is a mark of knowing him. Let your blast shields down! Give God access to your inner self so that you are free to resonate like a piano string in sympathetic vibration with the great heart of God. And prepare to be surprised by waves of sanctified emotion at times you do not suspect. Don't be embarrassed. Jesus, your Lord, also wept.