

# The audible weeper!

Luke 19:28-41

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On Monday of last week a 28-year-old fatally shot three children and three adults at Covenant Christian School in Nashville. The school is a ministry of Covenant Presbyterian Church where a friend of mine is pastor, on a campus just two miles from Lipscomb University where I teach. The community is grieving.

My good friend Scotty Smith wrote this one day later: *"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope"* (1 Thess. 4:13).

Heavenly Father, the grief was unrestrainable, the tenderness palpable, your presence undeniable. I went to bed last night close to numb from emotional exhaustion. I rise today grateful for the holy privilege of entering grief and risking hope.

Yesterday, our church family was trusted with extending tender mercies and safe harbor for grieving families, staff, and board members of Covenant School, and to pastors, elders, and deacons of Covenant Presbyterian Church. It was a long day, navigated along a grace-path that led us right into Jesus' open-ended welcome: *"Come to me all of you who are weary and heavily burdened. I will give you rest."*

Some friends I've known for 40 years weeping uncontrollably –some of the strongest women and men I know rendered beautifully weak. Shocked parents falling into each other's arms –needing to say nothing, not wanting to let go, so glad just to be together. Father, thank you for the unsought-gift, shared-calling, and difficult heart-work of grief. We grieve clumsily –often reluctantly, sometimes years after the trauma, loss, heart-rip.

Father, teach us how to grieve, and how to enter each other's grief. You will never walk us into hopeless-grief. Usually hope holds us before we can risk it. And, hallelujah, the hope you give doesn't replace our grief, it transforms it. Hope-kissed-grief makes us gentle, kind, and loving.

But how trustworthy is our hope? Can it sustain the weight of our anguish, the anger in our hearts, and the fear that we feel? We'll answer in this way: Father. We have never been more ready to celebrate Easter. Our hope is profoundly sure because Jesus' tomb is completely empty. Hallelujah, and So Very Amen.

I've titled this lesson *"The Audible Weeper!"* And I would like to start by focusing our attention on the wonder of the humanity of Jesus the Christ. We think of him as *the Son of God!* And that he is. But he more often than not called himself *the Son of Man!* John reminds us that *the Word* that was *"with"* and *"was"* God, *"became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father"* (John 1:14). Oh, the wonder of the divinity of this man Jesus. And oh, the glory of the earthy, hurtable, humanity of our Christ!

Those who walked the dusty roads with Jesus saw him laugh and cry and harness anger and be disgusted (usually with them!). You can picture some of those moments. Like when he caricatured the Pharisees as straining out gnats and swallowing camels! Or when he made a whip and chased the money changers out of the temple. Or when he rebuked the disciples for thinking he was too busy for the little children.

But perhaps his most vulnerable connection with humanity (other than his actual bloody death on the cross) was when he wept. It happened at least twice ... both times on the way to Jerusalem where he knew exactly what was going to happen to him. The culmination of history was at hand, the very masterstroke of God's redemptive plan ... that the Hebrew writer calls *"the joy that was set before him"* (Heb. 12:2).

John recalled the first weeping of Jesus. It's known as the shortest verse in the Bible: *"Jesus wept"* (John 11:35). He had received word that his good friend Lazarus was sick and near death. Lazarus (with his sisters Mary and Martha) lived in Bethany, just across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem. He waited two days because with God timing is everything. The disciples hoped he would not go, but after the two days' wait, he said, *"Let's go."* The disciples could feel the danger. It was palpable. It was in the air. Thomas even blurted out, *"Let's go with him so that we may die, too."*

Meeting Martha, then Mary on the outskirts of town, Jesus lingered with them for a while before asking where they had buried him. It was then that he broke down. *"Jesus wept"* (John 11:35). And the Jews standing nearby noted, *"See how he loved Lazarus!"* But a few minutes later, Jesus would go with them to the tomb. It was a cave with a large stone in front of it. When Jesus gave the command to *"roll the stone away"*, Martha objected: *"Lord, it's been four days; by now surely it stinks."* And after the removal of the stone and a prayer to the Father, Jesus spoke to dead Lazarus: *"Lazarus, come out!"* (John 11:43).

He did.

This miracle sealed Jesus' own death, and the religious leaders intended to make it happen as soon as possible! According to the flow of Scripture, it would not have been long after that Jesus would weep a second time. Not in the upper room. Not in the Garden of Gethsemane. Not even on the cross. As Jesus and his disciples approached Jerusalem one week before the crux of history, he sent for a donkey.

Read Luke 19:28-41.

Visualize this: the city of Jerusalem, swelled to overflowing with travelers from all over who had come to celebrate the annual Passover. Seeing Jesus approaching riding on a donkey, the masses parted like the Red Sea, cloaks and palm branches were torn off and thrown to the ground so that even the hoofs of the donkey would not have to touch the ground. Cries of *"Hosanna!"* were lifted

up! Believers couldn't quite fathom that they were witnessing the arrival of the Messiah into the city of Jerusalem. This spontaneous, unorchestrated, sanctified welcome must have been epic.

Our little two-year-old Lily has me wrapped around her finger. The other day I saw her slip past the gate on the steps into the "no Lily" zone. And right as I was about to tell her to come back down, she held a finger up to her mouth, "Shush." Then she smiled. At that moment she not only thwarted me telling her to come down ... she made me an accomplice. It was brilliant! So, I kept an eye on her but gave Anne a quiet heads up to come get the baby!

The religious leaders who were policing the situation scolded Jesus with more than a "Shush!" ***"Rebuke your disciples!"*** they ordered. Jesus responded, ***"If these do not praise me, then even the rocks will cry out."*** Oh, what a glorious moment! The creation was watching and stood ready, on call to praise! But the strangest thing happened next. In the middle of this incredibly boisterous, spontaneous celebration, the crowd heard a different sound. It was weeping. Weeping—from the one being praised! Weeping —from the arriving Messiah! Our Jesus saw Jerusalem and could not hold back; he wept! (Luke 19:41).

There's a difference between the weeping at Lazarus' tomb and the weeping at the sight of Jerusalem. One was audible; the other was silent. One was for a friend who had recently died; the other for a city that would soon nail Jesus to a cross. One was soon to be reversed with resurrection words spoken into an open tomb; the other was for the spiritual condition of people like sheep without a shepherd. Which was loud weeping? And which was silent weeping?

At the tomb of his friend Lazarus, Jesus shed tears. He wept silently. At the sight of Jerusalem, he wept out loud! What about you? What about me? Don't we more likely weep out loud at the tomb of a loved one? And do we even shed a tear for the spiritual condition of Madrid? Oh, the humanity of the one we call the Son of God! Oh, the divinity of the one who called himself the Son of Man.

See how he's so worthy of all praise, and live for him. See his humility, and imitate him. See his heart, and push into the very heart of God ... for Madrid and for all humankind.