**Good Grief**

Based on [Luke 19:41-48](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk19.41-48)

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I have a facebook friend who is convinced COVID-19 is really part of a bigger conspiracy. He keeps posting that suggest that coronavirus is a demonic plot arranged at the highest levels of government to seize power. I sympathize because christians are conspiracy theorists in a sense. We believe that there is an evil person secretly behind every tribulation and organizing and planning the undoing of mankind. Over against the idea that by and large people are trying to do good, even when they commit evil, we believe satan is using the political machines of the world to plot our destruction.

But as for my facebook friend, I wonder what his goal is in posting this stuff? I expect he wants people to “wake up” and “resist,” but that seems extremely unlikely. And besides, as a christian he knows that God is aware of what’s going on and he’s not going to let any conspiracy go farther than he wants it to go. So why post? Maybe it’s his way of grieving for us, those clueless masses of people as they cheerfully follow the government to their own destruction.

Jesus likewise, grieves for his people. From this we know there is such a thing as Good Grief. We usually think of grief as sorrow over some irreversible tragedy that has happened...a senseless death or crime. But there is a way of grieving over the future, over something that is going to happen and you can’t stop it.

I seem to recall a television series years ago about a man who, when some big tragedy like 9-11 was going to happen, he would receive the newspaper a day ahead of time. The show was about him trying to stop the news from happening. What was insightful was that the tragedy was never averted simply by telling people it was going to happen. Of course, the man was always able to stop the tragedy, but it was never simply because he knew what was coming.

Jesus knew what was coming for Jerusalem, and he weeps. He says what is about to happen and why, and he grieves. He grieves--not for what has happened--but for what will happen to them. In AD 70, the Romans will come and ruthlessly destroy the city in scenes too gruesome to mention. And this will happen not because the Romans are so powerful and evil...not because they are not more powerful than the God of Israel. Jerusalem has no reason to fear their enemies unless they make God their enemy. But that’s exactly what they are about to do. They are about to make their God their enemy. God is sending his son to them as a peace offering, but he knows that instead they will receive him as a sin offering.

St. Luke writes, “41**And when Jesus drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”**

There are two lessons that we can be mindful of in this gospel. The first is this… Scripture says that Jesus is of special comfort to us, **because he can sympathize with our weaknesses**. There is a mystery in God, that he is all powerful, and yet somehow shows frustration with people who are resist him. How can anyone resist God? I don’t know, but they do, and Jesus weeps over them. He grieves for them. And we who are to share in the sufferings of Christ are likewise to partake of this powerlessness.

After all, what do you do after trying to convince someone who is unwilling to be convinced? What can you do to keep a prodigal son from running off and living a wicked life? How do you stop a friend from making bad choices that will ruin his life? You can’t. You can speak the truth and warn about the coming ruin, but even if you resort to threats and tongue lashing, you cannot stop a heart intent on evil from carrying it out. You can speak the truth, but in the end all you can do for the erring friend, all you should do is pray and grieve.

Jesus is God, and in a special sense we see here that God faces powerlessness with grief, and we can too. Some things we cannot change, and we cannot ignore, so we grieve...though not as those who have no hope...but as those who know that not a single sparrow falls to the ground apart from God, and he is working all things, even tragedies in our life...for the good of those who love him.

The other lesson is that we are not on an equal footing with Jesus here. He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, with our temptations, with our powerlessness to change stubborn hearts, but he is without sin. We are with sin, and Jesus weeps for us. Sin always has consequences in this world. And he tells us how serious these are.

For instance, you have never murdered anyone, but a single word spoken to your brother or sister in anger is like plunging a knife into their soul. And it feels good, doesn’t it, to tell someone off who deserves it? But the tradeoff for that moment’s pleasure, experience shows that tongue lashings damage relationships far beyond the moment. You satisfy your momentary lust for blood, but at the added expense of nurturing the flesh, tarnishing your own soul and becoming worthy of God’s wrath. Jesus weeps over your unbridled tongue.

And yet there is such a thing as righteous anger. Jesus is clearly angry when he sees his Father’s house being made into a shrine for money and a den of robbers. And more than a tongue lashing, we know that Jesus made an actual whip for lashing these people? But again, Jesus is without sin. He is the perfect judge of righteousness, we are not.

Instead, we are not to punish the sins of others, but instead claim for ourselves the peace which passes all understanding. Martin Luther once said, “Don’t use the sins of others to measure your own righteousness.” All of the energy that you would spend in hating the sin of your neighbors, use that in hating your own. ***Then*** you will know the peace that Christ offers well enough to live in it. ***Then*** you can replace your hatred of your neighbor with grief over him. ***Then*** you can commend all things into the hands of God. He is merciful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you with the blood of the lamb...the sin offering slain in Jerusalem to make peace for the sin of the world.