

We Weep as “Jesus Wept”: A New Testament Perspective on Grief and Tears for Emotionally Suppressed Asians

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Abstract

It is observed that the New Testament contains fewer records of weeping narratives and employs comparatively restrained emotional language in contrast to the Old Testament. Additionally, psychologists and sociologists have noted that individuals from Asian cultures tend to exhibit a lower degree of emotional expressiveness relative to their counterparts in a European/American culture. This article is a response to both claims through the lens of weeping and tears in the NT, in particular, the tears of Jesus. I demonstrate that there is sufficient data for a survey on the topic of weeping and sorrow in the NT and argue that our findings can and should inform the relatively emotionally suppressed Asian culture. I focus only on the emotional expression of weeping by Jesus, for if Jesus himself is known to have personally experienced pain and sorrow and even openly wept and cried, then should not followers of Jesus also be encouraged and allowed to do the same?

Keywords

weeping, tears, grief, gospels, emotions, culture

It is often observed that the New Testament on the whole contains less emotional language than the Hebrew Bible, a claim not unfounded when one counts the number of lament psalms, the occasions on which mourning and weeping are recorded, and mentions of the wrath and grief of Yahweh.¹ It has also been observed that Asians are less emotionally

1 Recently, scholars have argued that the NT is not less “emotional” than the OT by studying the emotions of Jesus and other narrative characters in the Gospels; see Rebekah Eklund, *Jesus Wept: The Significance of Jesus’ Laments in the New Testament* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Scott Spencer, *Passions of Christ: The Emotional Life of*

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expressive in comparison to our Western counterparts, a hypothesis that has been proven in psychological experiments,² including those comparing children in European American culture with those in East Asia.³ While both assertions are realistic, I respond to them in this article through the lens of weeping and tears in the NT, specifically the tears of Jesus. My aims are 1) to demonstrate that despite the relative scarcity of “emotional” material

Jesus in the Gospels (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021; Matthew Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Emotion in the New Testament* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2005). Outside the Gospels, Ian Y. S. Jew, *Paul’s Emotional Regime: The Social Function of Emotion in Philippians and 1 Thessalonians* (London: T&T Clark, 2022) has shown interest in the use of emotions in the Pauline epistles.

- 2 Studies have shown that emotional control is highly valued in Asian culture. Asians are culturally trained to down-regulate emotional processing when required to suppress emotional expressions. Emotion suppression is more common in East Asian cultural contexts; see A. Murata, J. S. Moser, and S. Kitayama, “Culture Shapes Electrocardial Responses during Emotion Suppression,” *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 8, no. 5 (2013): 595–601; Anna Schouten, Michael Boiger, Alexander Kirchner-Häusler, Yukiko Uchida, and Batja Mesquita, “Cultural Differences in Emotion Suppression in Belgian and Japanese Couples: A Social Functional Model,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020): 1048. Yulia E. Chentsova-Dutton, Joyce P. Chu, Jeanne L. Tsai, Jonathan Rottenberg, James J. Gross, and Ian H. Gotlib, “Depression and Emotional Reactivity: Variation among Asian Americans of East Asian Descent and European Americans,” *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 116, no. 4 (2007): 777 argue that the East Asian norm of controlling emotion is also reflected in facial expressions of emotions. For more studies that demonstrate how East Asian cultures emphasize more emotional moderation and control compared to European-American culture, see M. H. Bond, *Beyond the Chinese Face* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); J. J. Gross, J. M. Richards, and O. P. John, “Emotion Regulation in Everyday Life,” in *Emotion Regulation in Families: Pathways to Dysfunction and Health*, ed. D. K. Snyder, J. A. Simpson, and J. N. Hughes (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2006), 13-35; J. A. Russell and M. S. M. Yik, “Emotion among the Chinese,” in *The Handbook of Chinese Psychology*, ed. M. H. Bond (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1996), 166–188.
- 3 A study that compared the crying of European- American, Japanese, and Chinese eleven-month-old infants found American infants crying more than Chinese infants, with Japanese babies in between the two (L. A. Camras, Harriet Oster, Joseph Campos, Rosemary Campos, Tatsup Ujiie, Kazuo Miyake, Lei Wang, Zhaolan Meng, “Production of Emotional Facial Expressions in European American, Japanese, and Chinese Infants,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 34, no. 4 (1998): 616–628). Another comparative experiment found Chinese and Japanese preschoolers showing more neutral expressions than American preschoolers (Ip Ka I, Alison L. Miller, Mayumi Karasawa, Hidemi Hirabayashi, Midori Kazama, Li Wang, Sheryl L. Olson, Daniel Kessler, and Twila Tardif, “Emotion Expression and Regulation in Three Cultures: Chinese, Japanese, and American Preschoolers’ Reactions to Disappointment,” *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 201 [2021]: 104972).

in the NT, there is sufficient content for a brief survey on the topic of weeping and sorrow, and then 2) to ask how our findings about emotions and the emotional display of crying can and should inform the relatively emotionally suppressed Asian culture.⁴ To reiterate, for purposes of space and focus, I focus only on the emotional expression of weeping by Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity, when he encounters situations of grief, agony, and sorrow.⁵

Given that Jesus himself is acknowledged to have personally encountered both pain and sorrow and, indeed, openly expressed these emotions through weeping and crying, is it not appropriate, then, to encourage Christians to similarly embrace such honest expressions of human experience? In this study, I ask the following questions: Where, how, and when (under what circumstances) does the NT portray Jesus as shedding tears? What do these emotionally pertinent texts convey about crying and grief? How do our findings influence the way we manage and exhibit our own emotions, particularly in an Asian culture that is inclined to control, moderate, or suppress them?

This article’s main section analyzes four passages that present Jesus in tears, agony, and sorrow in order to demonstrate comprehensively the NT’s use and display of his emotions. These texts include Jesus 1) at the death of Lazarus (Jn 11:35); 2) at the sight of Jerusalem (Lk 19:41); 3) at Gethsemane (Mt 26:37-39; Mk 14:33-35; Lk 22:40-44); and as described in Hebrews (Heb 5:7). After studying the accounts, we apply our observations to the Asian culture of modesty and reserve and consider the pastoral significance for when we intentionally include emotional expressions, such as encouraging weeping, into the life of the Asian church.

AT THE TOMB OF LAZARUS (JOHN 11:35)

We begin with a well-known story that is also the most likely biblical account that comes to mind whenever one is asked about when Jesus cries

4 I coin the term “emotionally suppressed” based on the above psychological studies.

5 Voorwinde’s survey through the four Gospels shows a list of twenty-five different emotions recorded for the person of Jesus, but this article focuses only on weeping. See Stephen Voorwinde, *Jesus’ Emotions in the Fourth Gospel: Human or Divine?* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 284-285.

or shows emotions. In the uniquely Johannine record, Jesus is said to have wept when he was brought to the tomb of his dear friend, Lazarus.

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus *began to weep*.⁶ (Jn 11:35)

The popular Bible quiz question “What is the shortest verse in the Bible?” is usually quickly answered by attentive Sunday School children: “Jesus wept” (Jn 11:35, NIV).⁷ Evidently and firstly, this shows that Jesus displays emotions through his tears. However, the simplicity of Jesus crying, as evidence of his emotions, is quickly complicated when we begin to wonder more deeply the reason for his tears. Was Jesus grieving over the death of Lazarus even though he was about to raise Lazarus, or were there other reasons? Scholars are divided over the question of *why* Jesus was moved to tears. While some commentators consider it inappropriate to offer “a psychologizing explanation” for “Jesus’ apparently contradictory emotions”⁸ (of indignation and teary sadness), many still attempt to make sense of it.

To answer this question, we need to pay attention to two verbs in v. 33 that describe Jesus as “greatly disturbed in spirit” and “deeply moved.” The former verb *embrimasthai* expresses indignation (especially from its use in the LXX), and the latter verb *tarassein* denotes a deep disturbance. The more polite and subdued English translations (“greatly disturbed” and “deeply moved”) seem to have failed to convey the impact of an angry and perturbed Jesus. A logical question follows: why would Jesus feel this way in a mourning scenario? Explanations range from 1) anger at the mourners’ faithlessness and lack of recognition of his ministry and ability⁹ and 2)

6 English Scripture texts used in this essay are quoted from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

7 The NRSV translates it as “Jesus began to weep,” based on the Greek aorist tense.

8 Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to St. John* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 334.

9 Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, The New American Commentary 25A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 360; E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*

anger at sin, death, and the work of Satan in the world¹⁰ to 3) Jesus being mentally and spiritually excited yet strained before performing the miracle of raising Lazarus¹¹ or 4) Jesus showing his human feelings by shedding tears and sharing in the grief of those present and mourning.¹²

I briefly assess the four possibilities.¹³ The first interpretation about Jesus being indignant at their lack of faith seems implausible since Jesus himself proceeds to cry, too. Further, Jesus cries *after* he is invited to “come and see” Lazarus (v. 34), so, his tears are more likely related to the death of Lazarus rather than their faithlessness.¹⁴ The third possibility is hard to establish because making claims about the psyche of Jesus based on John 11

(London: Faber & Faber, 1947), 405; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 846.

- 10 Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John (I–XII): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible 29 (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1966), 435; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 1999), 193; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press; Eerdmans, 1991), 416.
- 11 Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 340.
- 12 Ernst Haenchen, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 66; J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1929), 393.
- 13 Moore offers another option that draws on affect theory to explain the weeping. He argues that Jesus does not weep from a “deep, hidden, internal pool of emotion” (302) but out of “disgust...a certain unmistakable stench” (303) from Lazarus’s corpse (Stephen D. Moore, “Why the Johannine Jesus Weeps at the Tomb of Lazarus,” in *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions: Exploring Emotions in Biblical Literature* [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017], 287–310). Moore contends that Jesus came to overcome rotting flesh in this “Flesh Gospel” (308). Though a novel proposition, the narrative sequence of John 11 challenges Moore’s argument. The mention of stench only appears in v. 39, while his tears was already shed in v. 35. Furthermore, Jesus’s tears are more likely a reaction to the seeing (v. 34) than smelling.
- 14 F. Scott Spencer, *Passions of the Christ: The Emotional Life of Jesus in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 83-86 claims that the Greek word order conjoins “come/see” and “weep” in a tight sequence, and the literary role of “come and see” in preceding parts of the Fourth Gospel confirm it is not simply a conversion filler. Based on modern psychological explanations of the role of emotions and his reading of the narrative, Spencer argues that the actual seeing breaks Jesus down and causes him to burst into tears.

is at best an argument from silence. The second and fourth interpretations, in my opinion, do not have to be dichotomized and can be reconciled in the person of Jesus. The verb *tarassō*¹⁵ (11:33) is also used in 12:27; 14:1, 27 within the context of Jesus's imminent death and in 13:21 to portray Jesus's reaction to Satan's work in Judas. Thus, we can think of Jesus as reacting to Satan and death before raising Lazarus.¹⁶ Additionally, Jesus is said to love (*ephilei*, v.36) Lazarus, including the sisters (*ēgapa*, v.5), which makes it reasonable that he weeps and grieves for and with his loved ones.¹⁷

Thus, combining the second (anger against Satan) and fourth (solidarity with human grief) interpretations, I argue that Jesus sheds indignant tears at the face of Satan, sin, and death while also showing empathy and solidarity with the grief of Mary, Martha, and the others. Jesus is angered by the power of Satan though he will overturn it; he still shares in the grief and mourning though he will also reverse them. Since Jesus is said to love Lazarus, his dear friend, and the sisters (vv. 5, 36), it is in line with this sense of empathy that he weeps and grieves for and with his loved ones. Jesus's weeping can be seen as both challenging and comforting—we are challenged to stand up with anger against the ways of Satan but derive comfort in knowing that Jesus shares in our grief and sorrow in situations of death and loss.

Having compared the explanations for Jesus's tears, we now examine two key verbs that refer to weeping in John 11. These verbs do not attract much attention in the English translation, but they contribute toward a deeper appreciation for the pericope. The verb *klaiō* is used thrice to depict the weeping of Mary and the Jews (vv. 31, 33), but John uses the *hapax legomenon dakruō* instead for Jesus in v. 35. Some scholars argue that *klaiō* offers a sense of weeping or wailing while *dakruō* is more literally "to shed tears," a less emotionally intense expression. Bovon thinks *klaiō* "is stronger" than *dakruō* and "designates a real wailing."¹⁸ Klein refers

15 Of the six occurrences of *tarassō* in John, only Jn 5:7 uses it to describe water stirring; the rest refer to a human emotion.

16 Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John (I–XII): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible 29 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.), 435.

17 In other words, "Despite knowing what he is about to do, Jesus does not order the mourners to stop weeping. Instead, he participates with them in their mourning"; Eklund, *Jesus Wept*, 84.

18 François Bovon, *Luke: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*, Hermeneia

to Jesus’s *klaiō* as loud wailing.¹⁹ The word *klaiō* is described in the *LSJ* as “cry, lament, any loud expression of pain or sorrow, weep aloud” and in the *BDAG* as “weep, cry”; in both lexicons *dakruō* is “shed tears, weep.”²⁰ Though both describe weeping, there is the added element of lament and pain in the audible wailing of *klaiō* that is not present in the silent shedding of tears in *dakruō*.²¹

According to the above verb distinctions, we can establish the possibility that in John 11 Jesus’ tears are more controlled and, hence, differentiated from the weeping of Mary and the others. His less dramatic crying could be because he knows what he will do next—raise Lazarus. Jesus is the one who has power and authority to overturn the situation, but, before he does, he shares in the sorrow and tears of mere mortals. Nonetheless, lest we inadequately assume that Jesus is always more controlled and ‘stoic’ in his emotional display, we now turn to another text that unmistakably describes Jesus’s tears with the verb *klaiō*. We will further examine and compare

2 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 17. See also Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1560.

19 “Darum weint er über die Stadt, gemeint ist mit lautem Klagen”; Hans Klein, *Das Lukasevangelium* 10, 1st ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 617.

20 *LSJ-O* “δακρῦω”; “κλαίω” (Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, eds., *The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon*, 1996. <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ljsj>, accessed November 27, 2023); *BDAG* “κλαίω,” 545; “δακρῦω,” 211 (W. Arndt, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

21 In the field of classics, Donald Lateiner, “Tears and Crying in Hellenistic Historiography: Dacryology from Herodotus to Polybius,” in *Tears in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Thorsten Fögen (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2009), 105-134 studies the use of tears and crying in eleven Greek historians between 440-140BC. Lateiner at times breaks down the word usage frequency according to the δακρυ- and κλαί- stems, and though he does not explicitly remark on their differences, his translations mostly follow those of the *LSJ*. Elsewhere, Jan Ebele van der Veen, *The Significant and the Insignificant: Five Studies in Herodotus’ View of History* (J.C Gieben: Amsterdam, 1996), devotes a page to comparing the difference between κλαίειν and δακρῦειν when studying Herodotus’s history. He concludes that they differ in function: κλαίειν “wishes to communicate one’s feelings to others...is preponderantly the stylised and intentional demonstration of grief” while δακρῦειν “denotes the simple emotion of sorrow...designates an impulsive reaction...has no other function than to air one’s feelings of sadness” (31, italics original). Admittedly, these are half a millennium distant from NT usage but may inform our appreciation of the verbs.

the two weeping verbs after both passages have been studied within their narrative accounts.

JESUS WEeping OVER JERUSALEM (LUKE 19:41)

We move from a uniquely Johannine account to a uniquely Lukan one that also records Jesus weeping, this time not for a person but for a city—the holy city, Jerusalem. In the Lazarus narrative, we considered and found implausible the interpretation that Jesus was angered at the mourners’ lack of faith. Such an explanation, however, fits the case of Jesus’s tears over Jerusalem, where the text makes clear that he is lamenting the spiritual blindness of the great city.

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. (Lk 19:41)

In between Jesus’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem (19:38) and his going into the temple to drive out the vendors (19:45) is the uniquely Lukan insertion of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem as he views the city from the Mount of Olives (19:41, *kai ōs ēggisen idōn tēn polin eklausen ep’ autēn*). Luke explains the dramatic reaction as caused by the state of the Jerusalemites that will bring about their devastation. The first prediction of destruction is found in Lk 13:34-35, where Jerusalem is accused of killing the prophets and stoning the messengers. Now the theme is repeated but with the additional dramatic record of Jesus weeping over the holy city, and the additional accusation that the city does not recognize the things that make for peace (19:41), which includes their peace with God, and their divine visitation (19:44). A similar combination of weeping and destruction for Jerusalem reappears when Jesus meets the daughters of Jerusalem en route to his crucifixion (23:27-31). Stopping the women from beating their breasts and wailing, Jesus tells them not to weep for him or his death; instead he instructs them with the imperative *klaiete* to weep for themselves and their descendants’ destiny (v. 28).

These repetitions—from Lk 13:34-45 to 19:41-44 and to 23:27-28—are evidence that the state and future of Jerusalem is of utmost significance to Jesus. He himself weeps, and he also tells the daughters of Jerusalem to

weep—not for his impending cruel death, but for the devastating condition of the city.

With this introduction to Lk 19:41, we return to discussing the two weeping verbs before considering the significance of this text, as the choice of verb could influence our appreciation of this Lukan passage. As introduced, *klaiō* is a stronger verb than *dakruō*, and the only record of Jesus weeping (*klaiō*), in the sense of wailing and sobbing, is found here in Lk 19:41. Jesus is weeping (*klaiō*) in regret and sorrow over the holy city that is rejecting God—if only Jerusalem would recognize God. In Bock’s words, “like a parent watching a child make a foolish decision, Jesus mourns a city sealing its fate.”²²

The query that follows, then, is to ask how and whether the choice of *klaiō* in Lk 19:41 and *dakruō* in Jn 11:35 impacts our reading of the texts individually and comparatively. We recognize that while Luke and John are independent works, they are, broadly speaking, participants in a common linguistic culture and can be set in meaningful comparison. If we accept the reading of Jn 11:35 as Jesus sharing in the sorrow and tears of his friends and Lk 19:41 as Jesus’s sorrow over the impending destruction of Jerusalem, then the verb choices for the respective scenes are fitting. Luke 19 and John 11 are weeping accounts that convey a different tone of grief—John’s Jesus is quietly grieving (*dakruō*) the personal loss of a beloved friend, but he will soon reverse the situation, whereas Luke presents a Jesus utterly and openly wailing in pain and sorrow (*klaiō*) over the stubbornness of Jerusalemites headed toward a destruction that Jesus does not prevent.²³ Therefore, Matthews concludes that “only in Luke, do we find Jesus depicted in the throes of such deep, bodily sorrow.”²⁴

The exercise of studying Jn 11:35 side by side with Lk 19:41 is fruitful because we observe the potential distinctions between the only two verbs in the NT used to portray Jesus who sheds tears and the different scenarios in

22 Darrell L Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1560.

23 It requires a future research project to wonder whether John, assuming he knew Luke 19, intentionally chooses *dakruō* to record the Lazarus narrative.

24 Shelly Matthews, “The Weeping Jesus and the Daughters of Jerusalem: Gender and Conquest in Lukan Lament,” in *Doing Gender—Doing Religion: Fallstudien zur Intersektionalität im frühen Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, ed. Ute Eisen, Christine Gerber, and Angela Standhartinger (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 384.

which he would cry. I think the added emphasis placed on Jesus's weeping over the holy city suggests that a "spiritual death" (represented by Jerusalem and *klaiō*) causes more sorrow to the Lord than a "physical death" (Lazarus's death and *dakruō*). The Lord desires his people to recognize and welcome him, to live in the peace that he offers. When they turn their backs on God, Jesus weeps for them.

While a comparison between the Johannine and Lukan stories has yielded fruitful outcomes, I argue that we can appreciate Jesus's weeping over Jerusalem with greater depth when we taking into consideration the larger Lukan presentation of Jesus's emotions or lack thereof. It is for this purpose that we include the next cluster of pericopes.

JESUS AT GETHSEMANE (MATTHEW 26:37-39; MARK 14:33-35; LUKE 22:40-44)

It is widely acknowledged that within the Synoptic Gospels, the Lukan Jesus is most self-restrained, unbowed, or even unemotional. However, we have just seen that it is also Luke who chooses to present Jesus as wailing and bemoaning the fate of Jerusalem. How do we reconcile the two? First, we compare the different synoptic records of Jesus praying at Gethsemane. Assuming Markan priority, we notice that wherever Mark's Gospel attributes certain emotions to Jesus, Matthew mutes some of them, but Luke omits most of such depictions. This is especially evident throughout Luke's passion narrative, including in the following Gethsemane scene.

He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him (Mk 14:33-35).

He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want" (Mt 26:37-39).

When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground (Lk 22:40-44).

In terms of emotional control, Luke omits the three Markan statements (Mk 14:33-35) that emphasize Jesus's outpouring of distress and grief. Luke also edits Mark's dramatic "he threw himself on the ground and prayed" (Mk 14:35) to "knelt down, and prayed" (Lk 22:41), replacing signs of anxious physical collapse with a posture of piety. Later, in the same spirit, Luke replaces Ps 22:1, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46) with Ps 31:5, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46), denoting trust as opposed to devastation. The appearance of the comforting angel in Lk 22:43-44 has been used by some to counter the above depictions, but Senior argues that in the ancient world one understanding of agony is that of "victorious struggle."²⁵ These texts in Luke's passion narrative do present a very different Jesus.²⁶

We now revisit the question of why Luke would portray Jesus as resolved, unbowed, and in control throughout the passion narrative but also choose to present Jesus as wailing and sobbing (*klaiō*) at the state and fate of the holy city (above). How is the unemotional Lukan Jesus also the wailing Jesus? I argue that instead of assuming Luke as contradictory, we could appreciate the evangelist's use of Jesus's tears to emphasize Jesus's profound feelings toward the holy city.²⁷ Our comparison of synoptic

25 Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier 1989), 88. We should also note that some ancient authorities lack vv. 43-44.

26 Intrigued by Luke's unparalleled passion description, scholars have tried to explain the author's literary and narrative style through Socrates's example of noble death and/or Graeco-Roman and Jewish martyrological tradition. Shelly Matthews, "Clemency as Cruelty: Forgiveness and Force in the Dying Prayers of Jesus and Stephen," *Biblical Interpretation* 17, nos. 1-2 (2009): 144 describes Jesus's total control of emotions as "emperor-like."

27 D.G. George, "Jesus' Lack of Emotion in Luke: The Lukan Redactions in Light of the Hellenistic Philosophers" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2009), 242 calls this "an important counter-example of emotion used for emphasis by Luke in communicating to his auditors how utterly devastating was the destruction of

texts should accentuate the impact of Jesus's weeping over Jerusalem and heighten the reader's appreciation in that, of the many things to weep over, Jesus chooses his people. Moreover, we can reconcile the incongruity when we appreciate Jesus's tears as many tears viewed within the gospel's literary setting.²⁸ Like tears of a great general shed for the devastation of a great city, so are Jesus's tears for the destruction of Jerusalem, the great city.²⁹ What appears to be incompatible is resolved: Jesus's tears emphasize the importance of Jerusalem, and Luke's Jesus is portrayed as a great man who weeps over a great city.

Lest it appear that Jesus only displays intense emotions for Jerusalem, we promptly include the Matthean and Markan representations of Jesus in Gethsemane. Though the main motivation for comparing these texts was to highlight Luke's distinctive restraints and offer additional context for Jesus's weeping in Lk 19:41, we should nonetheless acknowledge Jesus's deep pathos in Mark and Matthew. As the moment of arrest and death approaches, Jesus is grieved, distressed, and agitated to the point of throwing himself on the ground and verbalizing that his grief is akin to death. We are given a peek into the real struggle of the person of Jesus in his moments of extreme desolation and agony. Though this essay does not allow space to discuss the intertextual references for each of Jesus's emotional gestures to enrich their significance, they are more than sufficient to show that Jesus has indeed experienced the tumultuous suffering of humanity—whether as one about to meet his own death or as one mourning the upcoming destruction of the holy city.

Jerusalem.”

- 28 See full argument in Matthews, “Weeping,” who demonstrates Luke's masculinizing rhetoric within Graeco-Roman topos. Also Colleen Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 127-142, on Luke's Jesus and masculinity (but more on Acts than on Luke).
- 29 E.g., Marcellus, who weeps for the city of Syracuse (Livy, *History of Rome* 25 24.11-15 [Yardley, *LCL* 355, 432]); Scipio the Younger for the city of Carthage (Polybius, *The Histories* 38.22.1-2 [Olson and Paton, *LCL* 161, 488]); and so forth. For more on manly tears, see Matthews, “Weeping,” 389.

JESUS WITH LOUD CRIES AND TEARS (HEBREWS 5:7)

This passage from Hebrews is included in our discussion, though it is unlike the earlier gospel records that present Jesus’s emotions in his earthly life and ministry, because it offers the additional perspective of how the author of Hebrews perceives Jesus as praying with much emotion, including tears. Our final text is discussed with the briefest treatment, as the focal point is predominantly on the implications of Jesus’s tearful prayer.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. (Heb 5:7)

When the author of Hebrews proclaims that Jesus prayed “with loud cries and tears” (*kraugēs ischuras kai dakruōn*, Heb 5:7), it recalls the scenes at Gethsemane (see above) and the passion narrative as a whole.³⁰ Though none of the gospels records any tears by Jesus in his passion, the author of Hebrews perceived the passion as excruciating for him to the point of loud cries and tears. Just as we interpreted the tears of Jesus at the death of Lazarus as a sharing in the grief of the mourners, here, too, Jesus shares in the travails and troubles of human life. He does not partake of hardship as a divine being who temporarily tastes humanity; instead, he fully embodies the human condition (see Heb 1-2; the role of the angels in Heb 1 is to demonstrate Jesus’s exaltation and superiority over them, but their role in Heb 2 functions to present Jesus’s humiliation in incarnation and death). The cries and tears “express how intensely Jesus entered the human condition”³¹ and point to the theme of Jesus as High

30 While the description in Hebrews is reminiscent of Gethsemane, none of the synoptic accounts describes it as loud cries and tears. We are unable to identify the origin of this tradition, but it is most likely connected to Jesus’s passion. For a helpful summary of views, see Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 148; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible 36 (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 107–108.

31 William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary 47A (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1991), 119.

Priest, a distinct christological motif in Hebrews.³² It is beyond our scope to detail the necessity of holding together divinity and humanity in order to comprehend the efficacy of Jesus's offering as priest. In the context of our discussion, what is pertinent to underscore is this: like an ordinary human, this high priest engages in fervent prayer and articulates his sentiments by way of profound, even dramatic demonstrations of emotion during his moments of distress.

The community to which Hebrews was written faced a serious crisis in their Christian faith, hence the repeated encouragement to "hold fast to our confession" (Heb 4:14; 10:23) and the call to perseverance and faith (Heb 10 and 11). I am of the opinion that the main purpose of Hebrews is to persuade its readers to keep their faith through presenting the incomparable superiority and finality of God's work in Jesus Christ.³³ In their difficulties, the congregation/audience of Hebrews can take heart in the fact that Jesus, the high priest, is able to empathize with their weakness and temptation, a point we further unpack below.

JESUS'S EMOTIONAL DISPLAY IN AN EMOTIONALLY SUPPRESSED ASIAN CONTEXT

Having explored four NT passages that refer to different circumstances and ways in which Jesus sheds tears and expresses himself dramatically, we now consider the pastoral implications for an Asian context. To recap, we found Jesus crying over Lazarus's death because of his anger against Satan and his sharing in grief with Mary and the others (Jn 11:35) as well as weeping over the condition of Jerusalem (Lk 19:41). Our comparison of the Gethsemane accounts reveals that Luke's account accentuates the significance of Jerusalem; notably, in Luke's portrayal, Jesus's expressions of profound grief characterized by wailing and sobbing are directed toward the Jerusalemites. Additionally, though not expressly centered around tears, the Markan and Matthean narratives depict Jesus in deep agony and suffering, which coheres with our general observations of Jesus in Luke and

32 This title appears no less than ten times; it saturates the epistle with theological and pastoral significance.

33 Donald Hagner, "The Son of God as Unique High Priest: The Christology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 247.

John who cries for Jerusalem and Lazarus. Lastly, we learned that Jesus is said to pray earnestly and dramatically with loud cries and tears (Heb 5:7).

We had established at the start of this essay that Asian cultural norms are more reserved in their expression of emotions, with the tendency to suppress and control them more than Europeans and Americans. The depiction of Jesus in states of vulnerability should remind us that Christians, too, grapple with afflictions, perplexities, and heartbreak and should be allowed the time and space to process and express them. I think the modern church, including and especially those influenced by Asian culture, has overemphasized the need to overcome and be victorious in all circumstances, to the neglect of acknowledging one's mental and emotional challenges and the need for therapeutic relief. In being unafraid to acknowledge our feelings honestly and to express intense emotion, I believe that we in fact identify ourselves with, and share in, the sufferings of Jesus.

Crying in most circumstances, especially in East Asian cultures, is usually not encouraged, particularly with a "face" culture in which maintaining one's reputation takes precedence. Even in contexts when crying is socially permissible, distinct gender roles are prescribed. For instance, popular Chinese sayings that profess "men don't cry" (*nan ren bu liu lei*) reflect a cultural norm discouraging male emotional expressions, but conversely, the saying "women are made of water" (*nu ren shi shui zuo de*) suggests greater acceptance of women weeping. This general cultural prohibition against men crying and the more lenient toleration for women doing so does not concur with the above passages regarding Jesus's public weeping. Moreover, if we emulate Jesus's example in Matthew's and Mark's respective Gethsemane scenes, we might even include allowance for physical outworkings such as collapsing on the ground, crying, and praying out loud at grievous situations. There is scarcely a hint of limiting or repressing emotions in these narrative records, which should encourage the more emotionally modest Asian to allow space for expression when the situation calls for it.

I do not propose to bring an overgeneralized application of permission to weep from a Greco-Roman world in antiquity to a non-homogenous modern Asian church world, when there are, in fact, multiple contours within various Asian cultures. I am also in no way insinuating that Jesus

was a cry-baby, as the NT world was very much influenced by Stoic ideas. I am, however, proposing that even within the more emotionally restrained sociocultural milieu of Stoicism, we have clear instances of Jesus in the Gospels showing dramatic emotions. I suggest that Jesus's example of weeping and tears can empower Asian Christians from a more reserved culture to inspire the provision of space, particularly within the church context, for emotions to be expressed more openly. This should not be interpreted as a prescriptive method for managing emotions, nor as a proposal for wholesale rejection of a culture more conscious of how to present emotions, but an encouragement for those habitually inclined to suppressing emotions to recognize the importance of not inhibiting these honest expressions; certainly neither to belittle or shame the voicing of one's pain.

In Heb 5:7, we recognized that the second Person of the Trinity became fully human, engaging in fervent, emotionally laden prayer amid adversity. The magnitude of the reality about Jesus's complete identification with humanity becomes particularly poignant now, as I write this essay in the season of Advent, when the church prepares itself for the incarnation. The infinite Son of God eternally joins himself to humanity, uniting with us as exemplified in his praying with loud cries and tears. Thus, we are confident that the God who took on flesh profoundly understands the necessity to weep readily in difficult times. As he understood the tribulations faced by the congregation addressed in Hebrews, so he, too, enters into our contemporary situations of poverty, persecution, and all forms of injustices; he recognizes the value and even benefits of tears. For Asians who find public displays of emotion awkward or counter to cultural norms, the portrayal of Jesus's intense display of emotions is assurance of a God who deeply identifies and empathizes with the human condition.

CONCLUSION

Although the NT contains fewer narratives explicitly centered on emotional records, we have uncovered sufficient data to investigate and explore the theme of weeping and emotional manifestations in the figure of Jesus. Our analysis focused on four texts that depict Jesus exhibiting unvarnished emotions in moments of distress and desolation. In these passages, Jesus shares in others' grief, weeps and laments over

unrepentance, succumbs to intense anxiety to the point of physical collapse, and exemplifies authentic humanity in times of anguish through prayers marked by loud cries and tears. These portrayals of Jesus challenge assertions that the NT lacks emotional depth and stand as a call to Christians to evaluate the acceptability of emotional expressions. They also encourage the incorporation of practices within the life of the church to acknowledge and support honest expressions—including those that involve open tears.

About author

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