

In 70 A.D., the Roman general Titus besieged and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple within her. The Jewish historian, Josephus, tells about its horrors. Starvation led even to cannibalism as the Romans shut up the city so that no one could get out. And then they finally destroyed it. It was a terrible time. Jesus said this would happen. He saw it coming. He who knows all things knew of this coming destruction on his holy city. And this made him weep.

Now, God isn't like man. He doesn't shift around from one opinion to another. He isn't fickle, changing his mind based on how he happens to feel at the time. Malachi says that the Lord does not change. And yet, the Bible still describes God with emotions. God gets angry. God shows favor. God hears the prayers of his saints, and he acts accordingly. How can this be? How can God be unchanging and yet reveal both joy as well as anger and even sadness? Isaiah says that God's thoughts and ways are not our own. They are as high as the heavens are above the earth. Psalm 145 says that God's greatness is unsearchable. We can't investigate the mind of God. And yet, he reveals himself to us. He reveals his anger. And here in his only begotten Son, he reveals his tears.

We aren't able to conceive of these different emotions apart from change. This is because we, by nature, are fickle. Our sinful nature is two-faced, double-tongued, and completely unfaithful. So when we think about different emotions, it's impossible for us to separate them from our own sinful desires. If we are sad, our own self-pity is always wrapped up in it. If we are angry, we can't escape the pride of our sinful hearts. If we are happy, the old Adam is always there trying to please itself. But when our Lord is rejoicing one moment, weeping in another moment, and then angry in another, he remains the same unchanging, faithful, and steadfast Lord of heaven. The source of his tears and his anger is the same source of his joy. It is his undying love for his fallen creation. This is the love, which flows out of the Father from eternity, the love of the only begotten Son, and the love of the eternal Spirit of the living God. The Lord does not change.

And yet, he became a man. He who doesn't change joined himself to what changes. He who is the Creator joined himself to his creation. He whose life is completely spotless and pure joined himself to flesh and blood to bear the filth of our sin in his own body.

And here he is, in the flesh, weeping. As tears roll down his cheeks he is revealing the face of his eternal Father. As he anticipates his death at the hands of those he came to save, his love remains undying. This is how he would bring peace to his people and to all people. But he weeps, because he knows that this peace, which surpasses all understanding, is hidden from their eyes. They can't recognize that God himself, their unchanging and faithful Lord, has come to help them. He has visited his people to redeem them, just as Zechariah sang. But they were fickle. Their hearts were swayed by the shifting winds of doctrine promising earthly peace and security. So they could not recognize the peace that only God can give.

Jesus wept at this. But his tears were not despairing tears. He wasn't shrinking from his duty. He wasn't losing hope. He was weeping, because his desire always remained the exact same from eternity. He desires all to be saved. He doesn't desire the death of the wicked but that they would be converted and live with him.

Again, this is too high and deep for us to peer into and figure out. Those who think they are wise will charge our Lord with being fickle or incompetent. After all, if he is almighty and if he truly desires all to be saved, then why doesn't he just make everyone believe? But those who think this way don't

understand the steadfast mercy of God. They expect God to coerce faith. But this isn't how faith is created. Faith comes from the gentle voice of the gospel. Matthew records Jesus saying that he longed to gather them like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. The Word of God remains the same. It doesn't change. But he meets sinners where they are. He has compassion. He bears with them, tenderly inviting them and calling them by his Holy Spirit. This is the unchanging power of God. And it is unsearchable. It is incomprehensible to natural reason. Yet, it remains true, never wavering, never influenced by shifting emotions.

See how Jesus weeps. These are the tears of God, the tears of him whose ways are from everlasting to everlasting. With these tears, he longs to embrace the sinners into his grace. This has always been the will of God. This has always been his undying love and grace toward sinners. As the prophet Malachi records, "I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O descendants of Jacob will not perish."

The fact that God doesn't change doesn't mean that he stands still and does nothing. He isn't some static being sitting high above only to benefit us once we figure out how to tap into his energy. No, he is the God who acts. This is why Jesus' tears turn to anger. Because he is true to his promise. He looks and sees the corruption of his temple, and by his undying love for his scattered sheep he takes action. His temple was supposed to be a house of prayer for all nations. It was supposed to be the place where God visits his people, forgives them, blesses them, and gives them eternal life. This has always been God's plan. So when he sees that it has been turned into a place to exploit the poor and make a profit, as if the temple grounds have become fairgrounds for entertainment and commerce, he is filled with zeal. This zeal is for the lost sheep who have wandered into sin. And when they see his bent brows and his angry face, he again is revealing the same face of his eternal Father. It is the same undying love and devotion for the flock of his inheritance. His whip against those who would steal this assurance away from his sheep goes right along with his rod and staff by which he comforts and leads his flock into green pastures and still waters.

James says that the wrath of man cannot produce the righteousness of God. Man's wrath is filled with pride. It's an uncontrollable emotion feeding the constantly shifting desires of the selfish heart. But Christ's wrath is pure. It is controlled by his perfect care for his sheep and his love for all sinners.

It may seem like God is fickle at times. When he told Abraham to sacrifice his own son, it seemed as if he was renegeing on his promise that the blessing would come through Isaac. When he threatened to wipe out all of Israel after they rebelled against him, it seems like he had made void his promise to bring Abraham's descendants into the Promised Land. When he gave up his only begotten Son into the torture of the cross and when Christ cried out, "My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?" it seemed that he had forgotten what he said when declared at the Jordan River, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." And when you feel the burning darts of temptation, when you are afflicted with sadness, when death and condemnation plague your conscience, it seems as if God has changed his mind when he said, "I have called you by name; you are mine."

But God is not changing. He is doing what he has always done with his children. He's testing our faith, just as he did with Abraham and all his saints. When we feel his heavy hand upon us, this is just our Lord overturning the tables of unbelief in our hearts and whipping out any selfish and despairing thoughts. He is pruning us in order to strengthen our confidence in his salvation, driving us to call upon him with a firm trust in his promise, and proving that the faith he placed in our hearts by his unchanging Word is the same faith, which clings unceasingly to his enduring promise. Though he afflicts us with sorrows, his

mercies remain new every morning. His faithfulness remains great. His love never departed from his Son, even as he hung forsaken on the cross. He heard his cries. These were cries made for your sake. You can therefore be confident that he hears when you call to him.

And so your Lord is with you in your tears. He's with you in your anger as well. But he isn't there to affirm you and tell you that you deserve to be sad and angry. He's not like a shallow friend who tells you what you want to hear. No, he sanctifies your tears. And he replaces your prideful anger with zeal for his truth. He teaches you to have sorrow over sin, to recognize that death is his curse on all that is evil. But in doing so he teaches you not to mourn as someone who has no hope. Because Jesus, in his weeping, did not just sit there sulking. He wept with hope. For the joy of your salvation, he was consumed with zeal to win for you salvation. So he patiently endured every insult, sadness, and suffering with that single goal and vision in mind.

If the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed because they didn't recognize the day of their Lord's arrival, then we should not think that we can escape this same fate if we neglect his Word. Listen to this warning given by St. Paul in Romans 11:

Remember that they were broken off because of unbelief, and you remain in place by faith. Do not be conceited, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you. So take note of God's kindness and his severity: severity on those who have fallen, but God's kindness on you—if you remain in his kindness; otherwise, you also will be cut off. (Rom 11:20-22)

God warns us against unbelief for the same reason he calls us to faith. Because he loves us. This remains true, constant, and unshaken. His face shines through tears, zeal, bloody sweat, and unspeakable kindness toward sinners. The eternal love of God, which drove him to embrace us poor, miserable sinners, is the same eternal love he reveals in his Word. It is the same pledge of peace, which he places in your mouth with his body and blood. Remain in his love. He is our fortress. So even though the earth is removed, the mountains are carried into the sea, and the waters roar, the living water flowing from our Savior will keep us glad. And as the Psalm says about the church, "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved." Amen.