

# Sweet Sorrow

*It's Just Not the Same*

Ezra 3:8-13

May 17, 2020

**Scripture Reading:** Psalm 133

**Opening ILL:** Sometimes you just don't know whether to laugh or to cry. Wearing a mask with a bad attitude—My unforgettable experience at Lowe's. I have to be honest...I hate wearing a mask. When it first became the rule to have to wear one to get into any store, or to pick up food or coffee or whatever, I had a very bad attitude about complying with this. Yet, things just needed to get done, so on the first day that masks were mandated, I went to Lowe's with Jen and complained THE ENTIRE WAY about wearing this mask! When we got to the parking lot and I had to put my mask on, I did...grudgingly. Now, taking a few steps toward the store, I saw an employee busy moving carts out of the cart return. Trying to be friendly, I said, "How are YOU today?" As he tried to reply, he inadvertently burped one of the biggest, loudest burps I have ever heard. Immediately, I turned to Jen and said, "I am glad that I am wearing this mask!" It is amazing how quickly our perspective can change.

## I. Introduction

A. Explaining the title of this sermon—Why sweet sorrow?

1. This phrase comes from Shakespeare in the play "Romeo and Juliet."

a. **Quote:** "A line from the play *Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare; Juliet is saying good night to Romeo. Their sorrowful parting is also "sweet" because it makes them think about the next time they will see each other."<sup>1</sup>

b. Why is it sweet?

i. Because a necessary by-product of love is sorrow.

ii. If you love your spouse, you feel sorrow when you lose him or her.

iii. The sweetness is found, though, in realizing that what you have is worth missing.

iv. If there were no sadness at a funeral, that would be...well...sad!

v. On the other hand, there is love in those tears! There is love and honor in that sweet sorrow!

c. Why is it sorrowful?

i. Because it is just not the same. Not yet, anyway.

d. How is this similar to what we are experiencing today?

i. There is a dash of sweetness in the sorrow.

ii. There is a dash of sorrow in the sweetness.

B. Explaining the tone of this sermon—Why sweet sorrow?

1. There are often multiple reasonable responses to a single historical reality.

a. There are multiple, reasonable responses to being here in church today:

i. You may be struggling, thinking, "It just isn't the same!"

ii. You may be excited, thinking, "it just isn't the same!"

b. There are multiple, reasonable opinions as to whether we should be in church today:

i. You may feel as though it would have been better to wait. I understand.

ii. You may feel as though it was foolish to suspend public worship in the first place. I understand.

c. The point is that even though we can't make everybody happy. Instead, our hope is to offend everybody equally. ☺

## II. Exposition

A. **Their Specific Situation**—The Israelites returned to their land and their temple. vv. 8-9

1. The historical setting—

a. They had been captives, first of Babylon and then of Medo-Persia for 70 years.

b. They got the permission to return and recapture some of their cultural identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Found on Dictionary.com

- c. They were rebuilding the temple!!
- 2. The emotional setting—Things just weren't the same as they used to be.
  - a. Couldn't they just worship God from Babylon?
    - i. Yes, but it just wasn't the same.

**Quote:** “This time there is no ark, no visible glory, indeed no Temple: only some beginnings, and small beginnings at that. But God is enthroned on the praises of Israel, and these could be as glorious as Solomon's. Perhaps they were more so, for while they matched the earlier occasion, word for word and almost instrument for instrument (2 Chr. 5:13), they were sung in conditions more conducive to humility than to pride, and called for a faith that had few earthly guarantees to bolster it.”<sup>2</sup>

**B. Their Sincere Scope**—The hope was to do things the “normal way”. v. 10a

- 1. This shows their desire to follow the Bible in its mandates for worship.
- 2. This shows an eagerness for public worship!
  - a. They didn't even have the walls up yet!
- 3. This shows us that those who wept did not do so because of the finished product.
- 4. This shows us that those who praised did not do so because of the finished product.
- 5. This shows us that those who were building this temple were trying their best to do so in a way that honored God and showed proper deference to their government.
  - a. Remember that Israel was not free during this time. No. Instead, they were fresh off of Babylonian (and then Medo-Persian) captivity.

**C. Their Sweet Sorrow**—The reactions to their situation were confusing v. 11-13

- 1. Don't miss the point here! They were assembled to worship!!
  - a. Couldn't they just do that in Babylon/Persia? Yes, but it wasn't the same.
  - b. Couldn't they just wait until the temple was finished? Yes, but it wasn't the same.
  - c. What was the big deal?
    - i. The big deal is that the very existence of the God of the Bible demands worship! We feel a compulsion...a drive to celebrate God. That's what Israel does here.
      - 1) They celebrate His goodness
      - 2) They celebrate His faithfulness
    - ii. This is what the world will never understand. They think that church is a duty or a burden that we must secretly want to get out of. They don't understand that gathering together to celebrate God is the joy of our hearts.
    - iii. **Balance:** I know that many of you are at home watching this and you are just aching to get back to public worship, but you just don't feel comfortable with the risk yet. That's ok. I totally understand and I hope that you don't feel judged by this. Instead, I hope you are thinking something like this: “I can't wait to get back to church, when I really feel like it is safe and reasonable.” I understand that.
- 2. Some (“all”?) rejoiced in worship.
  - a. Could it be that this was the universal, albeit initial response to the situation?
  - b. Could it be that even those who would later weep were aware of how great rebuilding the temple could be?
    - i. Unfortunately, we are never told and we have to be careful reading too much between the lines.
    - ii. On the other hand, the weeping of some is contrasted with the joy of others, so we know that they were not weeping for joy.
    - iii. It obviously had something to do with the newer temple being inferior (or simply different than) to Solomon's temple.
- 3. Some lamented that the new temple would never be as grand as Solomon's temple.

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<sup>2</sup> Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 12, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 53.

**Josephus quote:** But the priests and the Levites and the elders of the families, recalling to mind the former temple which had been very great and costly, and seeing that the one recently constructed fell short of the old one because of their poverty, and considering how far they had fallen below their ancient prosperity and a state worthy of the temple, were downcast, and being unable to master their grief at this thought, were moved to laments and weeping.<sup>12</sup>

4. Some rejoiced that they had a temple in which they could worship.
  - a. This was a sign of God's forgiveness.
  - b. This was a sign of God's faithfulness.
5. Both sides were so loud that you couldn't tell them apart!
  - a. Nobody could tell who was praising and who was weeping!

**Quote:** The last two verses have all the unexpectedness of actuality<sup>3</sup>

See Hag. 2:1–4; Zech. 4:9, 10

### III. Conclusions

A. It's just not the same—I understand, but remember that this is just the beginning.

1. We must take our lives and the church one step at a time.
2. Don't lose sight of the "good" because it cannot be "better".

B. It's just not the same—I understand, but remember that the Christian life is often a call to endure the "bad" until you get to the "good".

1. It can also very often be the call to endure the "good" until we can get to the "better".

C. It's not the same—I understand, but remember that life only goes in one direction.

1. I have had to tell myself this a lot during my current mid-life crisis. ☹️
2. As much as I wish I could go back in a time machine to see my kids as babies again, or to put more hair on my head and etc. Life just doesn't happen that way.
3. This life is like this noisy crowd. We have the choice to add to the cheers, to the boos, or to the boo-hoos. That is up to us.

**ILL:** A grandmother celebrates Christmas with her grandkids. She LOVES her grandkids, but deep (or not so deep) inside her heart, she misses grandpa who passed away years ago. She misses the time when she had her kids at home and little, cute and wonderful. It is good to be together, it is GREAT to be together, but she realizes that it is just not the same. What makes it worse is that it never will be. For us, who knows? Maybe the Lord may bring us a return to the way things used to be. Maybe He won't.

Either way, in celebration, in weeping, or even in sweet sorrow, may it ever be our intention and our life's pursuit to live

To the praise of His glory,  
Amen.

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<sup>12</sup> Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 11:81. Translation by R. Marcus in Josephus, 10 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978). The footnote to this section adds: "Josephus here amplifies somewhat" (6:353).

<sup>3</sup> IBID., 53.