

Shared Emotions

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INTRODUCTION

Disciples of Christ should be sympathetic to the needs of others, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep (Rom. 12:15-16). In his defense, Job said, "Have I not wept for the one whose life is hard? Was not my soul grieved for the needy?" (Job 30:25). In like manner, Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus, sharing the heartache of Martha and Mary (John 11:35). The writer of Hebrews admonishes believers to "Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body" (Heb. 13:3).

This weekend we had occasion to both rejoice and weep. Yesterday was Ryan's 25th birthday. Birthdays are fun, a time of rejoicing, blowing out candles, giving and receiving gifts, singing off-key, and most important of all, eating cake. It also was a sobering reminder of the brevity of life. Sister Lisa Jennings sent out a very touching post to her Facebook friends, saying her final goodbyes. To our knowledge, she has not yet passed away, but the end will soon come.

REJOICING OVER THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, rejoiced at the birth of their son, along with their neighbors and relatives (Luke 1:5-17, 57-58). There is also joy in heaven whenever a sinner repents (Luke 15:3-7), and is born again into the kingdom of the Lord (John 3:3-6). Christians rejoice at the spread of the gospel (Acts 11:19-24) and in expectation of their own salvation (1 Peter 1:3-9).

WEEPING OVER THE END OF A LIFE

Yet, we live in a world that is under the curse of sin and death. This sentence was imposed as a consequence of Adam's disobedience (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:1-7, 17-19, 22-24; 5:1-5; Rom. 5:12-14). As a result, we all face the certainty of physical death (Eccl. 3:1-8; Heb. 9:27-28). Yet, we are delivered from the fear of death through Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:23; Heb. 2:14-18).

Receiving hospice care, and facing the end of her life, sister Lisa Jennings recently wrote: *"Goodnight my sweet brethren and sisters in the Lord. I just want to express one last time how much your faithfulness has meant to me these last days. You have walked close beside me in*

prayers, admonitions and love. Though the journey's been hard, I cannot imagine it without each of you. God's plan for His people is so excellent! Our Savior's sacrifice so excellent. Our Holy Spirit's work so excellent! I love thy church, oh God! I've received so many blessings and God is fulfilling my last requests of a peaceful entrance into eternal rest. My Lord and Savior did not have what I've had in my last days and hours. Forever yours, Lisa Ann Jennings"

CONCLUSION

I have felt conflicting emotions this weekend, sharing the personal joy in celebrating a birthday of one I love, while knowing that several hundred miles away, dear friends are facing the impending loss of one who is equally dear to each of them. Extrapolate that out by billions, and try to comprehend the greatness of God who cares for each and every person (Matt. 10:29-31). God loves all humanity (John 3:16-21; Rom. 5:6-11). Jesus not only wept beside the tomb of Lazarus, but also over the impending doom of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44).

Our Lord provides a path of deliverance: by living a life of full obedience and dying on the cross, Jesus provided the perfect sacrifice for sins; He bore our griefs and carried our sorrow (Isa. 53:4-6). If you have not obeyed the gospel, or if your life is not right with God, will you not respond to the love of God while there is time and opportunity (2 Cor. 5:14-15)?