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Jason Henderson  
Market Street Fellowship

## Understanding Emotions

I want to take another brief break from our Ephesians study. We just finished the first chapter last week. And before we start the second I just had some things on my heart that I'd like to share. This won't be a series, just a one Sunday deal, and we'll probably pick up with Ephesians next week.

The thing that has been on my heart has to do with emotions. The Lord has been dealing with me about emotions for close to a year now, but only now do I feel like I have a bit of language to describe what I've been seeing.

It started last September. Just about every September since I can remember I get a brief but uncomfortable spell of emotional sadness. You might call it a heaviness or a mild depression. Its not a huge emotional trauma, just an uncomfortable "things are bad" kind of feeling. I've always been an emotional kind of guy...far more so than I would have chosen if I had anything to say about it.

I think I got it from my Dad who has been known to cry during a good AT&T commercial. Well, I know this is cheesy, but when I was a kid summers were like magic. I remember the feeling of being free from school, being free to run around, swim in the pool, take vacations. Summers were as good as life got as a kid. And it seems like they lasted forever. But every year when September came around my nostalgic Dad would sigh deeply and say "well, Jas...it looks like the lazy hazy days of summer have once again come to an end". And it was like someone just popped my happy balloon. It would kinda throw me into a funk. Just hearing myself say it makes me feel sentimental.

Well, anyway....even after I finished school, got married, and had a few kids, when September rolls around I often still get this wave of nostalgia and sentiment that comes out of nowhere. Even if that summer completely stunk - like I broke my leg, the kids all had chicken pocks, the house burned down, and the dog died - I'm still tearing up in September feeling that "the lazy hazy days of summer have again come to an end".

Ok, well this past September I was in my usual nostalgic funk that lasts for a week or two and the Lord began to show me some things about emotion. I began thinking and asking him about the purpose of emotion, the reality of emotion, the experience of emotion. I started wondering about the what's and why's of emotion. And that's when what I'm going to share with you today started to work in my heart.

It continued working in my heart over the next 10 months or so as I have continued to struggle on and off with emotion that corresponds to absolutely nothing in either the natural or the spiritual realm. And though I may have dropped a sentence into a sermon here or there about this, I've never really stood

here and tried to describe what I believe the Lord has been attempting to show me.

Well, one of the things I started to see was that **the controlling of emotion is behind almost every human purpose.** I know that may sound like an exaggeration, but just think about it for a moment. Why do you tell your kids to buckle up? So you don't have to **worry** as much. Why do you want job promotion? Because you want to **feel** successful. Why do you watch what you eat? Because you want to **feel** attractive. Why do you watch a movie? Because you want it to give you a **feeling** of excitement, drama, romance, horror, or happiness. Why do you lock your doors at night? Because you want to **feel** safe. Why do you go on vacation? Because you want to **feel** relaxed and free.

I couldn't really find many exceptions. Controlling human emotion seemed to be behind almost every human intention. Emotions were the goal, actions, relationships, jobs, food, etc. were the means. Can you hear what I'm saying? I started to think about almost everything I give my time, energy, mind, and body to...and in nearly every case I was seeking to **create, control, or prevent** some sort of emotion.

Now that may sound like simplicity itself to you. But it dawned on me in a new and powerful way. And here's why. In September, and then again in January, it struck me with a certain force that though we live to control emotions, emotions quite often have absolutely nothing to do with reality. I saw this: sometimes emotions have nothing to do with natural reality. But then I saw this: emotions almost NEVER have anything to do with spiritual and eternal reality. And that was a stunner when it really came into focus. The very purpose behind nearly everything I try to do corresponded to very little in reality.

And here is what really began to settle into my heart. **Emotions are for many what dictates to them what reality is. Emotions are what create reality. But in all truth, emotions are feelings that should be created BY reality, dictated by reality. Emotions should be the byproduct of knowing reality, not the defining of it.**

So then I began to watch myself. I began to watch how I responded to my own emotions. I began to watch what I called a good day and what I called a bad day. I began to notice what was a good time, and a bad time. What was my criterion? What was the measure or standard for deciding? It was emotion nearly every time.

One morning I'd wake up and feel happy. No reason, really. Just a nice dream, or a kid that wasn't crying, or sunshine on my shoulder. Good day! Happy day! Does it correlate with anything real? Maybe some natural reality, but does my emotion have anything to do with spiritual reality?

Well, the next day maybe I'd awake and I'd feel bad. Heavy or anxious or upset. No reason really. Or maybe there was a reason in the natural. But spiritual reality certainly hadn't changed. Spiritual reality was just as good in my "bad day" as it was in my "good day"...and so I began to see that my view of spiritual reality was not responsible for my sense of emotional well-being, but to the contrary, my sense of emotional well-being was responsible for my feeling of natural and

spiritual well being. In other words, as I have said – emotions were what defined reality, and were not the byproduct of knowing reality.

There was something more real to my emotions, more real to my soul, than what I knew to be real in Christ. And I knew that if my soul was as intimately acquainted with spiritual reality as it was with sunshine, crying kids, job promotions, vacations, and sore knees...then perhaps my soul could find rest in spiritual reality. But as it was, my heart was blown this way and that based nothing upon reality from God's perspective.

**I guess what I'm trying to say is that I realized that a happy day was really of no greater value than a sad day if in neither of them spiritual reality and truth were not the source of my emotions.** A good day wasn't necessarily good. A bad day wasn't necessarily bad – because my barometer was emotion and not truth.

And I began to reflect on how everything of the soul is like that. The soul, as I understand it, is more than just emotions. It is emotions, mind, and will. That maybe an intellectual oversimplification, but the soul is at least those things and each one is equally guilty of attempting to create a sense of reality that is so often contrary to the truth.

Is it not true that the natural mind of the soul, apart from its renewing, apart from the revealing of Christ is said to be "enmity with God". It is "unable to know the things of the Spirit". It is contrary to Him by nature. That is actually stated quite plainly in the next verse we will look at in Ephesians chapter 2, not to mention Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 2, Colossians 1, and elsewhere. Yes, the unrenewed mind, a mind that does not draw its reality from the mind of Christ, is a creator of false reality – no different than unrenewed emotion.

And nobody needs me to convince them that their will is contrary to God apart from "God working in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Our will bends to the lusts of the eyes, the lusts of the flesh, and the pride of life every time, until God conforms it to Himself.

I'm so used to talking about the carnal mind, the unrenewed mind, the natural mind. But I didn't realize that the emotions of the natural soul can be just as much a liar, deceiver, and creator of false reality as the adamic intellect. The soul of Adam is one in its nature. **Whether it be mind, emotion, or will. It will create and justify what it wants to be true. It will believe and rationalize and control what it wants for itself.** That is how we are by nature.

Now don't think about saying "Jason, don't be so hard on the natural man". I have said nothing that Scripture doesn't say even stronger. Jesus calls the ones who refuse his Word sons of the devil. Jesus says the flesh profits nothing. Jesus says apart from me you can do nothing. Paul says we are by nature children of wrath, contrary to God, enmity with Him. There is none that does righteousness, no not even one. There is none who seeks for God, no not even one. Etc.

I'm not exaggerating the darkness of the natural soul. I'm simply discovering it. And I'm discovering it to be deceived to the core. **Mind, emotion, and will. All three apart from the indwelling Christ, working as one to create, control, and justify a lie that feels good and safe and valuable.**

Ok, well it was as I saw this, that I also saw the other side of the coin. I saw what emotion was created for. I began to see it according to its created potential and purpose. What is that created potential? Well it's the same as any aspect of the soul. The soul is a vessel that can be the conduit and expression of the Life that dwells within it. In other words, emotion can be feelings that correspond with and move according to reality as God knows it to be.

Emotions can be the expression of one of two men. One of two sources. The darkened heart of Adam who's emotion is the reflection of his aspirations, fears, lusts, anger, love, etc. Or emotion can become the expression of the Person of Truth who is formed in the soul.

And somewhere along the line in the past several months I began to long in my heart, not as much for more happy days and less sad days, but for days where my emotion corresponded with spiritual reality. I didn't necessarily seek to create and control my emotions according to the earth, but rather to allow Him to show me Himself and all that is real and true in Him. And I knew that if what was true in His view became the view of my soul, then my emotions would follow suit. I knew that what faith saw must become more real than what sight saw. And of course it happens through the revealing of Christ by the Spirit of Truth.

One day a poem by Hudson Taylor stuck out in my mind. I remember reading it and posting it on my fridge years ago. It popped back in my mind. Here it is

*"LORD Jesus, make Thyself to me a living, bright Reality  
More present to faith's vision keen than any outward object seen;  
More dear, more intimately nigh than even the sweetest earthly tie."*

I loved the line "more present to faith's vision keen than any outward object seen". That's what I needed. The view that faith is of something more real than man-made emotion. Something that could subjugate and subdue all emotion to itself.

Well, then one night I couldn't sleep and I began to think about John 11:35. It's the shortest verse in the Bible. It simply says "Jesus wept". And I was laying there in bed with that verse in my head. And I kept thinking...why? Why did you weep. Now listen, I understand that Jesus was a man and that he had emotions. In the incarnation He was fully man, fully God. Yes, I understand that. But He was also a man who said over and over again things like "I do nothing of my own initiative, but only what I see the Father doing". "The Father abiding in Me does His works", "These words are not mine, but the Fathers". "These works are not mine but the Fathers". "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father". Jesus the Nazarene was, yes, the second Person of the Trinity. But while He walked on the earth He was a Branch to His Father as a Vine. He is even called "The Branch" in a significant number of Old Testament prophecies regarding Him.

His words, his deeds, his will, his mind, and yes His emotions...I was sure of it, were real, were felt, were powerful, but they were the reflection and expression of the Truth of the Father's heart just like everything else he did and said. And so the thought was rolling around in my head. And I began to ask Him as I lay there. Lord, why did you weep? What did you see? What was in your view? What was your perspective that day.

I knew the context was the death of Lazarus. And I knew that most everyone says that he wept either because He loved Lazarus so much or that He sympathized with Mary and Martha. But you see, neither of those explanations made the slightest bit of sense to me.

For one, He knew he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead before he even took the three day journey to get there. He told the disciples that. For two, why would he be crying for Mary and Martha if in 30 seconds He was going to bring their brother back from the grave. No. There had to be something else there. There had to be something else He was seeing. There had to be something of the Father's view working in Him, given expression through His tears. There had to be spiritual truth being manifest in emotion.

So I just kept thinking about it and eventually I suppose I fell asleep. And when I woke up in the morning I found John chapter 11 and read from it. And I thought I saw something. And then it dawned on me that this isn't the only time that Jesus is said to weep. He also wept over Jerusalem in Luke chapter 19 when He saw them refusing, rejecting, their salvation.

**Luk 19:41** Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, **42** saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things *that make* for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. **43** For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, **44** and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

And suddenly these two stories seemed to me to be the exact same thing. The exact same perspective. The same reality from God's perspective creating the same weeping. I believe I saw the truth that moved His soul in both situations. **Here we have the very love of God, the Salvation of God, the Redemption of God, the Resurrection from God, offering Himself to a people who are more interested in what they want to keep than they are what God wants to give.**

In both Jesus sees the rejection of faith, and was emotionally moved by their refusal to receive their created purpose, their refusal to receive the love of God offered to them in and as New Life, New Creation, New Covenant with God in the Christ. Here we see emotions that perfectly expressed the Truth of God and not the self of the human soul.

Jesus wasn't weeping because Lazarus died. He wasn't weeping tears of sympathy for Mary and Martha, or anything like that. He was weeping because they wouldn't see the reality of HIS love that He was offering – the Resurrection and the Life. Right there is the love of God – He offers the dead His Son as their Resurrection and Life.

First Martha runs up to Him and says "if you were here my brother wouldn't have died" Jesus I want my brother back! Jesus you could have prevented my pain. Jesus you could have stopped this from happening. Jesus looks at her and says, Martha your brother will live. And she's not happy with that answer. She says "Well, I know that he'll live again in the resurrection of the dead". Jesus stops her and says "Martha, I AM THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD!!!" "Martha, you want

your own version of the Resurrection and the Life, and yet here I am presenting Myself to you. You want your own plan, your own idea, your own vision. You want your brother back, and I am your means to it. But I am offering you something far greater than a resuscitated brother. I'm offering you Myself as the Resurrection and the Life.

And Jesus walks along and then Mary runs up to Him and says the exact same thing. "Jesus, if you were here, my brother wouldn't have died!".

**Joh 11:32** Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." **33** Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.

Now this part where He it says "He groaned in the spirit and was troubled"...this threw me off for a minute because the translation makes it sound like Jesus gets sad. But I looked up both of these words and found that they are translated according to the natural mind, and not according to their meaning. "Groan" and "troubled" make it sound like he's heartbroken and grieving. But I looked up that word "groan" and it means "to snort with anger, to have indignation, to sigh with chagrin". I looked up the word "troubled" and the Greek has nothing to do with sadness. It means "agitated, disturbed, perplexed".

In other words, Jesus looked at Martha, then Mary, then all these Jews, saw what they wanted, saw into the heart, and snorted with indignation and was agitated. And then He wept. "Jesus wept." Why? Because truth was moving His emotions according to the mind of God. Because God's view was that these here were no different than the city of Jerusalem that He wept over. He wasn't just sad for their hurt feelings, He was seeing that they wanted their own version of love, their own version of resurrection, their own version of Messiah, their own version of help, their own version of life, their own version of Savior, just like all the rest. **He was a means to their end, and when he had failed to deliver what they wanted, they wept for themselves.**

And He looked around hoping for faith, hoping for something of God's view working in their soul, and he found what God has so often found before. The Old Testament is filled with God and His prophets weeping over His people refusing their purpose, rejecting their calling, standing against their salvation, wanting something else. Wanting a salvation and a savior of their own design.

And so Jesus wept with the mind of God who has always wanted to tabernacle with a people according to His perfect salvation. A God that had sent into the world not a man who just did resurrections, but His Son who WAS the Resurrection and the Life. Not man that just fixed natural problems, but a Son that brought them with Himself out of the natural realm. Not a deliverer from Roman occupation, but a deliverer from Satanic and Adamic occupation. And Christ wept God's tears as he found (and still finds) men and women weeping and seeking him because of the loss of soul comfort rather than to find the reality of what He has given.

These Jews that wept over Lazarus were like those He wept over in the city of Jerusalem. They could not see "the things that make for their peace". **They saw themselves, and tried to crown Him king of their own agenda.** And I thought...my Lord, how many times have I done that to you as well?

But see, one of the things that stood out to me was that the Jews were guessing at why He wept. "Look how much He loved Lazarus", they said. Wrong guess. That wasn't it. He was obviously there to raise Him. But we still guess today at why he weeps. And the best thing we can come up with, the only thing that makes sense to our darkened mind, emotions and will, is the same thing the Jews thought that day. We project on Him what we would be seeing in such a situation, rather than sharing His view of what the Father was seeing. **We only want the things that we think will make for our peace.**

Now, please, I am not suggesting to you that Jesus doesn't care about pain or tribulations. I am not suggesting that he is stoic robot that couldn't care less about tears. I am only suggesting to you that it wasn't man's sentiment that caused Him to weep here, but God's view working in Christ of man's rejection of the love of God. Their failure to see, or want to see, their salvation.

Jesus says "how long must I put up with this faithless generation". Another place it says "and Jesus marveled at their lack of faith". Another place "and Jesus rebuked them for their lack of faith".

And what I'm particularly trying to point out this morning is that here we have a Man, granted – the Son of God, but a Man who's emotions were the expression of the Life of God. He cried the tears of God. He rejoiced in the Truth of God. He rebuked and defamed the enemies of God. He did all of that saying "I do nothing of my own initiative. The Father abiding in Me does His works". I see here a picture of the purpose and divine intention for the emotion of the human soul – to become the expression of the God who makes His tabernacle in the soul of man.

I'm not standing up here saying that emotion is meaningless. Far from it. I'm simply saying that it can be as deceptive as the natural mind – simply the feelings of the natural man. But I'm also saying that it can become, as we grow up in Him what we read about in Jesus Christ the Nazarene – emotion becoming the expression of the true heart of God.

And I'm challenging you to allow the Lord to deal with your heart along these lines. So often I have found that I seek God for the comfort of my own emotion when the very thing he is trying to show me is that **my emotion is shouting lies into my heart.** And my life has become an attempt to create and control my own emotion. **Sometimes when we are crying to him to bring back our Lazarus, He is trying to show us that we are rejecting the fullness of our salvation.** Quite often I'll choose a fixed emotion over the knowledge that my emotion correlates to nothing in reality, nothing of His eternal purpose.

And I am no expert in any of this. I am just beginning to learn. But I have found that as I seek truth more than good feelings, I find God cutting emotional ties to things that are created by me, and connecting ties with that which is newly created in Him. And though that is awkward, it is good. Friends, I'm not talking about being emotionless. This isn't some eastern religious nonsense. I'm talking about the soul of man becoming the expression, the branch, the vessel of the Life that lives within. Amen