

The Displeasure of Jesus

by George MacDonald

George MacDonald explores the nature of Jesus' displeasure, emphasizing the importance of obedience and understanding in the context of divine love and anger.

Topics: "Divine Love", "Faith And Trust"

Description

George MacDonald preaches about Jesus' response to the sorrow of Martha and Mary, highlighting his deep love and desire for his followers to trust in God's plan. He emphasizes the importance of faith, obedience, and understanding God's love even in times of loss and grief. MacDonald delves into the significance of Jesus' anger, indignation, and tears, revealing his divine nature and compassion towards humanity's struggles and unbelief. He challenges Christians to trust in God's sovereignty, believe in the resurrection and eternal life, and find comfort in the assurance that God is always working for their ultimate good.

Transcript

When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled.--John xi. 33.

Grimm, in his lexicon to the New Testament, after giving as the equivalent of the word *embrimaomai* in pagan use, 'I am moved with anger,' 'I roar or growl,' 'I snort at,' 'I am vehemently angry or indignant with some one,' tells us that in Mark i. 43, and Matthew ix. 30, it has a meaning different from that of the pagans, namely, 'I command with severe admonishment.' That he has any authority for saying so, I do not imagine, and believe the statement a blunder. The Translators and Revisers, however, have in those passages used the word similarly, and in one place, the passage before us, where a true version is of yet more consequence, have taken another liberty and rendered the word 'groaned.' The Revisers, at the same time, place in the margin what I cannot but believe its true meaning--'was moved with indignation.'

Let us look at all the passages in which the word is used of the Lord, and so, if we may, learn something concerning him. The only place in the gospel where it is used of any but the Lord is Mark xiv. 5. Here both versions say of the disciples that they 'murmured at' the waste of the ointment by one of the women who anointed the Lord. With regard to this rendering I need only remark that surely 'murmured at' can hardly be strong enough, especially seeing 'they had indignation among themselves' at the action.

It is indeed right and necessary to insist that many a word must differ in moral weight and colour as used of or by persons of different character. The anger of a good man is a very different thing from the anger of a bad man; the displeasure of Jesus must be a very different thing from the displeasure of a tyrant. But they are both anger, both displeasure, nevertheless. We have no right to change a root-meaning, and say in one case that a word means he was indignant, in another that it means he straitly or strictly charged, and in a third that it means he groaned. Surely not thus shall we arrive at the truth! If any statement is made, any word employed, that we feel unworthy of the Lord, let us refuse it; let us say, 'I do not believe that;' or, 'There must be something there that I cannot see into: I must wait; it cannot be what it looks to me, and be true of the Lord!' But to accept the word as used of the Lord, and say it means something quite different from what it means when used by the same writer of some one else, appears to me untruthful.

We shall take first the passage, Mark i. 43--in the authorized version, 'And he straitly charged him;' in the revised, 'And he strictly charged him,' with 'sternly' in the margin. Literally, as it seems to me, it reads, and ought to be read, 'And being angry' or 'displeased' or 'vexed' 'with him, he immediately dismissed him.' There is even some dissatisfaction implied, I think, in the word I have translated 'dismissed.' The word in John ix. 34, 'they cast him out,' is the same, only a little intensified.

This adds something to the story, and raises the question, Why should Jesus have been angry? If we can find no reason for his anger, we must leave the thing as altogether obscure; for I do not know where to find another meaning for the word, except in the despair of a would-be interpreter.

Jesus had cured the leper--not with his word only, which would have been enough for the mere cure, but was not enough without the touch of his hand--the Sinaitic version says 'his hands'--to satisfy the heart of Jesus--a touch defiling him, in the notion of the Jews, but how cleansing to the sense of the leper! The man, however, seems to have been unworthy of this delicacy of divine tenderness. The Lord, who could read his heart, saw that he made him no true response--that there was not awakened in him the faith he desired to rouse: he had not drawn the soul of the man to his. The leper was jubilant in the removal of his pain and isolating uncleanness, in his deliverance from suffering and scorn; he was probably elated with the pride of having had a miracle wrought for him. In a word, he was so full of himself that he did not think truly of his deliverer.

The Lord, I say, saw this, or something of this kind, and was not satisfied. He had wanted to give the man something so much better than a pure skin, and had only roused in him an unseemly delight in his own cleanness--unseemly, for it was such that he paid no heed to the Lord, but immediately disobeyed his positive command. The moral position the man took was that which displeased the Lord, made him angry. He saw in him positive and rampant self-will and disobedience, an impertinent assurance and self-satisfaction. Filled, not with pure delight, or the child-like merriment that might well burst forth, mingled with tears, at such deliverance; filled, not with gratitude, but gratification, the keener that he had been so long an object of loathing to his people; filled with arrogance because of the favour shown to him, of all men, by the great prophet, and swelling with boast of the same, he left the presence of the healer to thwart his will, and, commanded to tell no man, at once 'began'--the frothy, volatile, talking soul--'to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into a city, but was without in desert places.'

Let us next look at the account of the healing of the two blind men, given in the ninth chapter of Matthew's gospel. In both the versions the same phrases are used in translation of the word in question, as in the story of the leper in Mark's gospel--'straitly,' 'strictly,' 'sternly charged them.' I read the passage thus: 'And

Jesus was displeased'--or, perhaps, 'much displeased'--'with them, saying, See that no man know it.'

'But they went forth, and spread abroad his fame in all that land.' Surely here we have light on the cause of Jesus' displeasure with the blind men! it was the same with them as with the leper: they showed themselves bent on their own way, and did not care for his. Doubtless they were, in part, all of them moved by the desire to spread abroad his fame; that may even have seemed to them the best acknowledgment they could render their deliverer. They never suspected that a great man might desire to avoid fame, laying no value upon it, knowing it for a foolish thing. They did not understand that a man desirous of helping his fellows might yet avoid a crowd as obstructive to his object. 'What is a prophet without honour?' such virtually ask, nor understand the answer, 'A man the more likely to prove a prophet.' These men would repay their healer with trumpeting, not obedience. By them he should have his right--but as they not he judged fit! In his modesty he objected, but they would take care he should not go without his reward! Through them he should reap the praises of men! 'Not tell!' they exclaim. 'Indeed, we will tell!' They were too grateful not to rumour him, not grateful enough to obey him.

We cannot surely be amazed at their self-sufficiency. How many are there not who seem capable of anything for the sake of the church or Christianity, except the one thing its Lord cares about--that they should do what he tells them! He would deliver them from themselves into the liberty of the sons of God, make them his brothers; they leave him to vaunt their church. His commandments are not grievous; they invent commandments for him, and lay them, burdens grievous to be borne, upon the necks of their brethren. God would have us sharers in his bliss--in the very truth of existence; they worship from afar, and will not draw nigh. It was not, I think, the obstruction to his work, not the personal inconvenience it would cause him, that made the Lord angry, but that they would not be his friends, would not do what he told them, would not be the children of his father, and help him to save their brethren. When Peter in his way next--much the same way as theirs--opposed the will of the Father, saying, 'That be far from thee, Lord!' he called him Satan, and ordered him behind him.

Does it affect anyone to the lowering of his idea of the Master that he should ever be angry? If so, I would ask him whether his whole conscious experience of anger be such, that he knows but one kind of anger. There is a good anger and a bad anger. There is a wrath of God, and there is a wrath of man that worketh not the righteousness of God. Anger may be as varied as the colour of the rainbow. God's anger can be nothing but Godlike, therefore divinely beautiful, at one with his love, helpful, healing, restoring; yet is it verily and truly what we call anger. How different is the anger of one who loves, from that of one who hates! yet is anger anger. There is the degraded human anger, and the grand, noble, eternal anger. Our anger is in general degrading, because it is in general impure.

It is to me an especially glad thought that the Lord came so near us as to be angry with us. The more we think of Jesus being angry with us, the more we feel that we must get nearer and nearer to him--get within the circle of his wrath, out of the sin that makes him angry, and near to him where sin cannot come. There is no quenching of his love in the anger of Jesus. The anger of Jesus is his recognition that we are to blame; if we were not to blame, Jesus could never be angry with us; we should not be of his kind, therefore not subject to his blame. To recognize that we are to blame, is to say that we ought to be better, that we are able to do right if we will. We are able to turn our faces to the light, and come out of the darkness; the Lord will see to our growth.

It is a serious thought that the disobedience of the men he had set free from blindness and leprosy should be able to hamper him in his work for his father. But his best friends, his lovers did the same. That he

should be crucified was a horror to them; they would have made him a king, and ruined his father's work. He preferred the cruelty of his enemies to the kindness of his friends. The former with evil intent wrought his father's will; the latter with good intent would have frustrated it. His disciples troubled him with their unbelieving expostulations. Let us know that the poverty of our idea of Jesus--how much more our disobedience to him!--thwarts his progress to victory, delays the coming of the kingdom of heaven. Many a man valiant for Christ, but not understanding him, and laying on himself and his fellows burdens against nature, has therein done will-worship and would-be service for which Christ will give him little thanks, which indeed may now be moving his holy anger. Where we do that we ought not, and could have helped it, be moved to anger against us, O Christ! do not treat us as if we were not worth being displeased with; let not our faults pass as if they were of no weight. Be angry with us, holy brother, wherein we are to blame; where we do not understand, have patience with us, and open our eyes, and give us strength to obey, until at length we are the children of the Father even as thou. For though thou art lord and master and saviour of them that are growing, thou art perfect lord only of the true and the safe and the free, who live in thy light and are divinely glad: we keep thee back from thy perfect lordship. Make us able to be angry and not sin; to be angry nor seek revenge the smallest; to be angry and full of forgiveness. We will not be content till our very anger is love.

The Lord did not call the leprosy to return and seize again upon the man who disobeyed him. He may have deserved it, but the Lord did not do it. He did not wrap the self-confident seeing men in the cloud of their old darkness because they wrapped themselves in the cloud of disobedience. He let them go. Of course they failed of their well-being by it; for to say a man might disobey and be none the worse, would be to say that no may be yes, and light sometimes darkness; it would be to say that the will of God is not man's bliss. But the Lord did not directly punish them, any more than he does tens of thousands of wrongs in the world. Many wrongs punish themselves against the bosses of armed law; many wrong-doers cut themselves, like the priests of Baal, with the knives of their own injustice; and it is his will it should be so; but, whether he punish directly or indirectly, he is always working to deliver. I think sometimes his anger is followed, yea, accompanied by an astounding gift, fresh from his heart of grace. He knows what to do, for he is love. He is love when he gives, and love when he withholds; love when he heals, and love when he slays. Lord, if thus thou lookest upon men in thine anger, what must a full gaze be from thine eyes of love!

Let us now look at the last case in which this word *embrimaomai* is used in the story of our Lord--that form of it, at least, which we have down here, for sure they have a fuller gospel in the Father's house, and without spot of blunder in it: let us so use that we have that we be allowed at length to look within the leaves of the other!

In the authorized version of the gospel of John, the eleventh chapter, the thirty-third verse, we have the words: 'When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit and was troubled; '--according to the margin of the revised version, 'he was moved with indignation in the spirit, and troubled himself.' Also in the thirty-eighth verse we read, according to the margin of the revised version, 'Jesus therefore again being moved with indignation in himself cometh to the tomb.'

Indignation--anger at the very tomb! in the presence of hearts torn by the loss of a brother four days dead, whom also he loved! Yes, verily, friends! such indignation, such anger as, at such a time, in such a place, it was eternally right the heart of Jesus should be moved withal. I can hardly doubt that he is in like manner moved by what he sees now at the death-beds and graves of not a few who are not his enemies, and yet in the presence of death seem no better than pagans. What have such gained by being the Christians they

say they are? They fix their eyes on a grisly phantasm they call Death, and never lift them to the radiant Christ standing by bed or grave! For them Christ has not conquered Death:

Thou art our king, O Death! to thee we groan!

They would shudder at the thought of saying so in words; they say it in the bitterness of their tears, in their eyes of despair, in their black garments, in their instant retreat from the light of day to burrow in the bosom of darkness? 'What, would you have us not weep?' Weep freely, friends; but let your tears be those of expectant Christians, not hopeless pagans. Let us look at the story.

The Lord had all this time been trying to teach his friends about his father--what a blessed and perfect father he was, who had sent him that men might look on his very likeness, and know him greater than any likeness could show him; and all they had gained by it seemed not to amount to an atom of consolation when the touch of death came. He had said hundreds of things to Martha and Mary that are not down in the few pages of our earthly gospel; but the fact that God loves them, and that God has Lazarus, seems nothing to them because they have not Lazarus!

The Lord himself, for all he has been to them, cannot console them, even with his bodily presence, for the bodily absence of their brother. I do not mean that God would have even his closest presence make us forget or cease to desire that of our friend. God forbid! The love of God is the perfecting of every love. He is not the God of oblivion, but of eternal remembrance. There is no past with him. So far is he from such jealousy as we have all heard imputed to him, his determination is that his sons and daughters shall love each other perfectly.

He gave us to each other to belong to each other for ever. He does not give to take away; with him is no variableness or shadow of turning. But if my son or daughter be gone from me for a season, should not the coming of their mother comfort me? Is it nothing that he who is the life should be present, assuring the well-being of the life that has vanished, and the well-being of the love that misses it? Why should the Lord have come to the world at all, if these his friends were to take no more good of him than this?

Having the elder brother, could they not do for a little while without the younger? Must they be absolutely miserable without him? All their cry was, 'Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died!' You may say they did not know Christ well enough yet. That is plain--but Christ had expected more of them, and was disappointed. You may say, 'How could that be, seeing he knew what was in man?' I doubt if you think rightly how much the Lord gave up in coming to us. Perhaps you have a poor idea of how much the Son was able to part with, or rather could let the Father take from him, without his sonship, the eternal to the eternal, being touched by it, save to show it deeper and deeper, closer and closer.

That he did not in this world know everything, is plain from his own words, and from signs as well: I should scorn to imagine that ignorance touching his Godhead, that his Godhead could be hurt by what enhances his devotion. It enhances in my eyes the idea of his Godhead. Here, I repeat, I cannot but think that he was disappointed with his friends Martha and Mary. Had he done no more for them than this? Was his father and their father no comfort to them? Was this the way his best friends treated his father, who was doing everything for them possible for a father to do for his children!

He cared so dearly for their hearts that he could not endure to see them weeping so that they shut out his father. His love was vexed with them that they would sit in ashes when they ought to be out in his father's sun and wind. And all for a lie!--since the feeling in their hearts that made them so weep, was a false one.

Remember, it was not their love, but a false notion of loss. Were they no nearer the light of life than that? To think they should believe in death and the grave, not in him, the Life!

Why should death trouble them? Why grudge the friendly elements their grasp on the body, restoring it whence it came, because Lazarus was gone home to God, and needed it no more? I suspect that, looking into their hearts, he saw them feeling and acting just as if Lazarus had ceased to exist.

'Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.'

'Thy brother shall rise again.'

'I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'

'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die.'

I will not now endeavour to disclose anything of the depth of this word of the Lord. It will suffice for my present object to say that the sisters must surely have known that he raised up the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow of Nain; and if the words he had just spoken, 'Thy brother shall rise again,' seemed to Martha too good to be true in the sense that he was going to raise him now, both she and Mary believing he could raise him if he would, might at least have known that if he did not, it must be for reasons as lovely as any for which he might have done it. If he could, and did not, must it not be as well as, yes, better than if he did?

Martha had gone away, for the moment at least, a little comforted; and now came Mary, who knew the Lord better than her sister--alas, with the same bitter tears flowing from her eyes, and the same hopeless words, almost of reproach, falling from her lips! Then it was--at the sight of her and the Jews with her weeping, that the spirit of the Lord was moved with indignation. They wept as those who believe in death, not in life. Mary wept as if she had never seen with her eyes, never handled with her hands the Word of life! He was troubled with their unbelief, and troubled with their trouble. What was to be done with his brothers and sisters who would be miserable, who would not believe in his father! What a life of pain was theirs! How was he to comfort them? They would not be comforted! What a world was it that would go on thus--that would not free itself from the clutch of death, even after death was dead, but would weep and weep for thousands of years to come, clasped to the bosom of dead Death! Was existence, the glorious out-gift of his father, to be the most terrible of miseries, because some must go home before others? It was all so sad!--and all because they would not know his father! Then came the reaction from his indignation, and the labouring heart of the Lord found relief in tears.

The Lord was standing, as it were, on the watershed of life. On one side of him lay what Martha and Mary called the world of life, on the other what he and his father and Lazarus called more abundant life. The Lord saw into both worlds--saw Martha and Mary on the one side weeping, on the other Lazarus waiting for them in peace. He would do his best for them--for the sisters--not for Lazarus! It was hard on Lazarus to be called back into the winding-sheet of the body, a sacrifice to their faithlessness, but it should be done! Lazarus should suffer for his sisters! Through him they should be compelled to believe in the Father, and so be delivered from bondage! Death should have no more dominion over them!

He was vexed with them, I have said, for not believing in God, his and their father; and at the same time was troubled with their trouble. The cloud of his loving anger and disappointed sympathy broke in tears; and the tears eased his heart of the weight of its divine grief. He turned, not to them, not to punish them for their unbelief, not even to chide them for their sorrow; he turned to his father to thank him.

He thanks him for hearing a prayer he had made--whether a moment before, or ere he left the other side of the Jordan, I cannot tell. What was the prayer for having heard which he now thanks his father? Surely he had spoken about bringing Lazarus back, and his father had shown himself of one mind with him. 'And I knew that thou hearest me always, but because of the multitude which standeth around I said it, that they may believe that thou didst send me.' 'I said it:' said what? He had said something for the sake of the multitude; what was it? The thanksgiving he had just uttered. He was not in the way of thanking his father in formal words; and now would not naturally have spoken his thanks aloud; for he was always speaking to the Father, and the Father was always hearing him; but he had a reason for doing so, and was now going to give his reason. He had done the unusual thing for the sake of being heard do it, and for holy honesty-sake he tells the fact, speaking to his father so as the people about him may hear, and there be no shadow of undisclosed doubleness in the action--nothing covert, however perfect in honesty. His design in thus thanking aloud must be made patent! 'I thank thee, father, for hearing me; and I say it, not as if I had had any doubt of thy hearing me, but that the people may understand that I am not doing this thing of myself, but as thy messenger. It is thou, father, art going to do it; I am doing it as thy right hand.--Lazarus, come forth.'

I have said the trouble of the Lord was that his friends would not trust his father. He did not want any reception of himself that was not a reception of his father. It was his father, not he, that did the works! From this disappointment came, it seems to me, that sorrowful sigh, 'Nevertheless, when the son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?'

The thought of the Lord in uttering this prayer is not his own justification, but his father's reception by his children. If ever the Lord claims to be received as a true man, it is for the sake of his father and his brethren, that in the receiving of him, he may be received who sent him. Had he now desired the justification of his own claim, the thing he was about to do would have been powerful to that end; but he must have them understand clearly that the Father was one with him in it--that they were doing it together--that it was the will of the Father--that he had sent him.

Lazarus must come and help him with these sisters whom he could not get to believe! Lazarus had tasted of death, and knew what it was: he must come and give his testimony! 'They have lost sight of you, Lazarus, and fancy you gone to the nowhere of their unbelief. Come forth; come out of the unseen. We will set them at rest.' It was hard, I repeat, upon Lazarus; he was better where he was; but he must come and bear the Lord company a little longer, and then be left behind with his sisters, that they and millions more like them might know that God is the God of the living, and not of the dead.

The Jews said, 'Behold how he loved him!' but can any Christian believe it was from love to Lazarus that Jesus wept? It was from love to God, and to Martha and Mary. He had not lost Lazarus; but Martha and Mary were astray from their father in heaven. 'Come, my brother; witness!' he cried; and Lazarus came forth, bound hand and foot. 'Loose him and let him go,' he said--a live truth walking about the world: he had never been dead, and was come forth; he had not been lost, and was restored! It was a strange door he came through, back to his own--a door seldom used, known only to one--but there he was! Oh, the hearts of Martha and Mary! Surely the Lord had some recompense for his trouble, beholding their joy!

Any Christian woman who has read thus far, I now beg to reflect on what I am going to put before her.

Lazarus had to die again, and thanked God, we may be sure, for the glad fact. Did his sisters, supposing them again left behind him in the world, make the same lamentations over him as the former time he went? If they did, if they fell again into that passion of grief, lamenting and moaning and refusing to be comforted, what would you say of them? I imagine something to this effect: 'It was most unworthy of them to be no better for such a favour shown them. It was to behave like the naughtiest of faithless children. Did they not know that he was not lost?--that he was with the Master, who had himself seemed lost for a few days, but came again? He was no more lost now than the time he went before! Could they not trust that he who brought him back once would take care they should have him for ever at last!' Would you not speak after some such fashion? Would you not remember that he who is the shepherd of the sheep will see that the sheep that love one another shall have their own again, in whatever different pastures they may feed for a time? Would it not be hard to persuade you that they ever did so behave? They must have felt that he was but 'gone for a minute . . . from this room into the next;' and that, however they might miss him, it would be a shame not to be patient when they knew there was nothing to fear. It was all right with him, and would soon be all right with them also!

'Yes,' I imagine you saying, 'that is just how they would feel!'

'Then,' I return, 'why are you so miserable? Or why is it but the cold frost of use and forgetting that makes you less miserable than you were a year ago?'

'Ah,' you answer, 'but I had no such miracle wrought for me! Ah, if I had such a miracle wrought for me, you should see then!'

'You mean that if your husband, your son, your father, your brother, your lover, had been taken from you once and given to you again, you would not, when the time came that he must go once more, dream of calling him a second time from the good heaven? You would not be cruel enough for that! You would not bemoan or lament! You would not make the heart of the Lord sad with your hopeless tears! Ah, how little you know yourself! Do you not see that, so far as truth and reason are concerned, you are now in precisely the position supposed--the position of those sisters after Lazarus was taken from them the second time? You know now all they knew then. They had no more of a revelation by the recall of Lazarus than you have. For you profess to believe the story, though you make that doubtful enough by your disregard of the very soul of it. Is it possible that, so far as you are concerned, Lazarus might as well not have risen? What difference is there between your position now and theirs? Lazarus was with God, and they knew he had gone, come back, and gone again. You know that he went, came, and went again. Your friend is gone as Lazarus went twice, and you behave as if you knew nothing of Lazarus. You make a lamentable ado, vexing Jesus that you will not be reasonable and trust his father! When Martha and Mary behaved as you are doing, they had not had Lazarus raised; you have had Lazarus raised, yet you go on as they did then!

'You give too good reason to think that, if the same thing were done for you, you would say he was only in a cataleptic fit, and in truth was never raised from the dead. Or is there another way of understanding your behaviour: you do not believe that God is unchangeable, but think he acts one way one time and another way another time just from caprice? He might give back a brother to sisters who were favourites with him, but no such gift is to be counted upon? Why then, I ask, do you worship such a God?'

'But you know he does not do it! That was a mere exceptional case.'

'If it was, it is worthless indeed--as worthless as your behaviour would make it. But you are dull of heart, as were Martha and Mary. Do you not see that he is as continually restoring as taking away--that every bereavement is a restoration--that when you are weeping with void arms, others, who love as well as you, are clasping in ecstasy of reunion?'

'Alas, we know nothing about that!'

'If you have learned no more I must leave you, having no ground in you upon which my words may fall. You deceived me; you called yourself a Christian. You cannot have been doing the will of the Father, or you would not be as you are.'

'Ah, you little know my loss!'

'Indeed it is great! it seems to include God! If you knew what he knows about death you would clap your listless hands. But why should I seek in vain to comfort you? You must be made miserable, that you may wake from your sleep to know that you need God. If you do not find him, endless life with the living whom you bemoan would become and remain to you unendurable. The knowledge of your own heart will teach you this--not the knowledge you have, but the knowledge that is on its way to you through suffering. Then you will feel that existence itself is the prime of evils, without the righteousness which is of God by faith.'

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