

David & Svea Flood

Legacies of Light, Part 1

Psalm 126:5

In the early 1800's, a Presbyterian minister by the name of Robert Murray McCheyne pastored . . . ever so briefly.

He served in what we would call a pastor/teacher role for less than 5 years, but would see some 700 people come to faith in Jesus Christ.

He used to tell other pastors, "preach to your people as on the brink of eternity." Robert died at the age of 29 from typhus.

Yet his ministry was so profoundly effective that Scotland was impacted for decades to come . . . and 200 years later he is still the subject of study and great respect.

John Philips wrote that several years after he died, another pastor was deeply concerned that his own ministry was producing such little spiritual fruit that he decided to visit the church where McCheyne had pastored. He found a custodian busily at work and asked him if he could show him around. He did. The pastor asked this humble man if he somehow knew the secret to McCheyne's fruitful ministry. The old man led the young minister into McCheyne's study and said, "Sit down there at that desk. Now, put your elbows on the table." He did so. "Yes, that was the way McCheyne used to do it," said the old man. "Now, put your face in your hands." The visitor obeyed. "Now, let the tear run

down your cheeks. That was what McCheyne used to do."ⁱ

The Psalmist wrote in *Psalm chapter 126 and verse 5, Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy. He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.*"

While the immediate context is the return of Israel from exile, the concept of sowing and weeping and bearing fruit is picked up and applied by our Lord when he talks about the seed of the Word of God (*Matthew 13*).

Paul used the same analogy when he referred to planting the seed and God making it grow. (*1 Corinthians 3:6*).

And Paul would say that he wrote to the Corinthians and his letters were bathed in tears (*1 Corinthians 2:4*); He reminded the Ephesian elders that he had taught and pastored them *with tears and through trials (Acts 20:19)*.

In Paul's day, the gods were considered unmoved by human emotions or needs. They called this unmovable quality in their gods, *apatheia*, from which we get our word, *apathy*.

The gods were apathetic – they were unmoved and unmovable.

So why the recommendation to bear seed with tears – to serve Christ, like Paul did, with a heart of compassion and emotion . . . this isn't godlike, is it?

Has it ever occurred to you that we never read in the New Testament that Jesus laughed - although by reading his sermons and offhanded comments, he had a great sense of humor. In fact, His first miracle was at a festive wedding party.

But we're never told He laughed, because He more than likely did – often – and we could assume that God the Son would.

But what you might never assume that God the Son would do would be to literally cry . . . and shed real tears.

In *John's Gospel and chapter 11*, Jesus arrives at the tomb of Lazarus, he's been dead for 4 days according to *verse 17*.

He stands near the tomb and we're told in *verse 33 that When Jesus saw her weeping (Mary, Lazarus' sister) and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.*

In other words, Jesus was moved deeply when he saw the grief and heard the weeping brought about by death.

He was not apathetic!

In fact, the verb translated – He became troubled – is a Greek word used of a horse, breathing heavily under the strain on his harness.

You could also translate it, to shudder.

Phillips translates it *He was deeply moved and visibly distressed"*

Now notice verse 35. You might underline it . . . you've probably memorized it – notice, Jesus wept!"

God is crying.

In fact, the tense of the verb could literally render this this verse, "*Jesus burst into tears.*"

He's crying in a graveyard. Imagine, even though knowing that He's about to demonstrate His divine power over death and prophecy the coming resurrection to His glory, He still slips into our most common, universal grief.

And if God can cry, so can you!

The Rabbi's taught the people in Jesus' day that the soul of the deceased hovered over the body, intending to re-enter if possible, but after 3 days it departed to Sheol – the place of the dead – convinced that it had no chance of reviving the body that once carried it about.

It isn't a coincidence that Jesus waited until the fourth day to perform this miracle of resurrection power. There could be no denying it. Lazarus didn't somehow resuscitate from nearly dying, he was resurrected from the dead.

In verse 43. Jesus says with a loud voice – "Lazarus, come forth."

Literally, "Lazarus, here, outside."

Augustine was the one who first said, that if Jesus had not called Lazarus by name, when Jesus commanded, "Come forth!" everyone buried would have immediately resurrected.

Tears were followed with joy . . . a harvest of resurrection power.

Jesus wept . . . for a man.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, He wept for His world

Hebrews 5:7 says it all, "In the days of His flesh, he offered up prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to him who was able to save him from death . . ."

Not only does this text inform us that there were numerous times Jesus wept – more than likely including that moment He lamented, or cried over His nation in *Matthew 23:37 "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . I would have gathered you children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not.*

Jesus wept for a man. He wept for his nation.

And the context of Hebrews 5:7 is an inside look at the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus wept over His soon coming substitution for the sins of the world.

In the Garden, Jesus Christ effectively surrenders to the will of the Father, with much crying and in great agony, signifying His willingness to die.

Matthews Gospel account, chapter 26. Let's begin at verse 36. Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

Now you need to get a picture in your mind - in Jerusalem itself there were no gardens. The city was too crowded, and there was also a law that the city's sacred soil should not be polluted with manure. I'm sure that people in general, because of the cramped, crowded conditions, appreciated this anti-manure law.

However, some of the richest residents owned private gardens out on the Mount of Olives. They built beautiful stone walls around their private acres where they would rest and relax.

Evidently Jesus had a wealthy friend who had evidently offered Him his garden as a place to rest and pray.

In Matthew 26:37. We're told that Jesus took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and troubled.

This word, troubled, refers to literally being surrounded by sorrow.

Jesus not only cries over the death of a loved one, He cries over the sorrow of suffering and abandonment by the Father all that the cross would represent.

Notice verse 38. Then He said to them "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."

Why does Jesus ask them to watch with Him?

Is He concerned about them betraying Him? Is He troubled over their soon coming desertion of Him? Is this an implicit warning to Peter that he really needs to pray and not promise. Is He grieved and sorrowful over His nations rejection of Him? Is it already ringing in His ears that the nation will cry out, "We have no King but Caesar – crucify Him!" Is He weeping over the coming loss of fellowship with the Father?" Could it be the coming pain of crucifixion? Was it the ugly truth that He would become sin for us, when He'd never known one single sin?

All of the above are true.

Jesus Christ will go out weeping . . . but what a difference on Sunday morning . . . like a seed, isolated and dying and buried, will translate into a harvest of joy.

The seed of His self-sacrifice is the same thing demonstrated a thousand times over in the lives of believers – some we have studied together – believers who were surrounded by the sorrow of night, but the tables turned – some of them only after they died – and then, the sorrow of night was replaced with joy that came . . . in the morning.

In this last biographical illustration in our series, it remains to me one of the most touching demonstrations of self-sacrifice, death, sorrow . . . and fruit.

In 1921 David Flood, his young wife, Svea and their little 2 year old son left Sweden for the interior of Africa. They traveled with another young missionary couple – these two couples had been active church members, they sang in the choir, Svea played the violin and was the church soloist. But they had committed their lives to the gospel for unreached tribes in Africa.

They were filled with enthusiasm and optimism as they literally hacked their way through the mountains of the Congo, to begin their ministry at some yet undetermined, unreached village.

To their surprise, one village after another refused them entrance, convinced that they would anger the village gods and bring them great trouble.

Days of carrying their own supplies, hungry, weak, they prayed as they reached another village on the side of a mountain that they would finally find rest and ministry opportunities.

But the chief in the village was even more hostile than all the others. He demanded that they leave.

Their biography reads, "They struggled to carry their supplies to the summit and after putting up their tents they knew they were too weary to set out again. So they decide to clear the brush and build mud huts, doing their best with these hostile villagers.

During the next agonizing weeks, which stretched into agonizing months, David and Svea Flood struggled with learning Swahili and, along with the Erickson's, tried everything they could, but the village chief only tightened his grip on his people.

Villagers were prohibited from even visiting the missionaries – only one little boy was allowed to go up and sell them chickens and eggs.

David was amazed at his wife's insistence that while they might never reach the village – and probably never impact Africa, she could perhaps win this child for Jesus Christ.

So, every time this boy visited their camp, she showered him with love and attention . . . sure enough, the other missionaries watched one afternoon as Svea knelt with this little boy and lead him in a prayer of repentance.

He had to keep his decision for Christ a secret in the village, lest he not be allowed to return, or worse.

But to the others, this mission was a failure.

Eventually the Erickson's decided to leave David, Svea and their little boy and return to an established mission station many miles away.

Even though the Flood family battled malaria, desperately crude conditions, they decided to stay.

Sometime later Svea announced that she was expecting their second child. She was already weak and struggling physically and David feared the worst.

It was too late to travel through the jungles of the Belgian Congo without risking her life and the life of their unborn child – the baby would be born in their mud hut, on the mountain.

The young native Christian carried the news back to the village and the chief surprisingly allowed one of the women to serve as a midwife.

By the time the baby was due, Svea Flood was weak with malaria – when the African midwife arrived, Svea was groaning in pain and suffering from high fever.

Their little girl was born, and Svea whispered that she be called Aina (ah-ee-nah), one of the classical Swedish names for girls.

17 days later, Svea Flood died.

Hopeless and filled with bitter rage, David dug a crude grave for his 27 year old wife. How could he possibly care for his 2 year old son and now a sickly little baby girl without assistance?

He hired a young man from the village, along with several others and took his children down the mountain and to the mission station.

He was finished with the ministry, the gospel, and God. As far as he was concerned, God had taken the life of his faithful bride and their ministry had been nothing less than a tragic waste.

The problem was, returning to Sweden was a monumental task – David knew that he had no one to feed or care for his baby girl.

The Erickson's had been unable to have children and David offered them the opportunity to adopt Aina. They were thrilled at the chance and agreed.

With that, David took his son and left the station – never to return again . . . in fact, he never even looked back.

Before Aina turned 1 year old, Joel and Bertha Erickson had their food poisoned by unbelieving natives and within days of each other, they both would die.

Aina was once again without parents. She would soon be claimed by another missionary couple and raised as their own daughter.

When she was 3 year old, Aina and her adoptive parents left the mission field of Africa for good and eventually settled in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Her Swedish name was changed to Aggie.

Aina would later write that, even as a young girl, she knew she was different. She would become known as the daughter of the missionary who died on the mountain, rescued by missionaries who were poisoned and, really, as her biography title reads, "Be a girl without a country."

Eventually, Aina attended North Central Bible College in Minneapolis and married a godly young man who entered the ministry.

Years went by. Aina had no information about her father. She knew very little of her past. She knew her parent's names of course and their homeland of Sweden, but that was about it.

She hardly had time to think about it . . . with a husband and a family and a busy ministry; in fact, her husband, Dewey Hurst. He had become the president of a Bible College in Seattle, Washington.

Then one day, unexpectedly, a Swedish religious magazine appeared in her mailbox. She had no idea who had sent it, and of course she couldn't read the words. But as she turned the pages, one photograph arrested her attention. It was a picture of a small white cross planted in the earth over an obvious burial site –and on the cross was the name, Svea Flood.

She jumped in her car and raced to the home of a college professor who was Swedish. She translated as she read – two missionaries, pushing through the African jungle, camping at night and traveling by day came across a village in the Belgian Congo and came across this burial plot and took a picture.

They began to inquire and found out that it was the missionary mother of a baby; then the death of the mother, but not before leading one African boy to Christ; then how the father left her in the hands of fellow missionaries.

The article continued, sadly, Svea Flood didn't live long enough to learn that the little African boy they had won to Christ on that mountain top went on in time to gain permission from the village chief to start and build a school.

Gradually, this now mature young man, teacher, leader, taught the Gospel of Christ and all his students came to trust in Jesus Christ as well. And they then evangelized their parents, and even the chief became a Christian. Now that village has 600 believers and an active church profession Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

All because of the sacrifice and the tears and the sowing of David and primarily Svea Flood.

Aina couldn't believe the news. She began to cry and thank God for letting her learn the truth of her parents and their sacrifice and the harvest of fruit.

For their 25th wedding anniversary, the Bible College gave the Hursts a vacation in Sweden, where, among other things, Aina could search for her father.

It wasn't difficult to find his family – David Flood had remarried, had 4 children, but his wife had also died.

Now, as an old man, he was wasting away as an alcoholic and professed agnostic who dared anyone to talk to him about God.

After an emotional reunion with her half brothers and sister, Aina brought up the subject of seeing their father.

They weren't too optimistic about the idea – he had become deeply bitter, had little to do with any of them and, most of all, hated God.

They told her, "Look if you do see him, don't talk about spiritual things . . . whenever he hears the name of God, he flies into a rage."

Aina was determined to see him. She eventually made it to his little apartment – the door was answered by a housekeeper. Inside his room there were liquor bottles on every window sill; the table was covered with more bottles. And in the far corner – she wrote in her autobiography – was a small, wrinkled old man lying on a rumpled bed, his head turned away.

Diabetes and a stroke had further crippled him to this one room for the past 3 years.

The housekeeper bent down and said, "Papa, Aina's here." He turned toward me and I took his hand. "Papa?" I said.

He began to weep. "Aina" he said, "I never wanted to give you away."

"It's all right, Papa," I said softly, holding him my arms, "God took care of me."

He stiffened suddenly and the tears stopped. "God forgot us all," he spat, "Our lives have been

like this because of Him. I was in Africa all that time . . . and only one little boy . . . and then I lost your mother.”

“Papa, I’ve got a little story to tell you. You didn’t go to Africa in vain. Mama didn’t die in vain. The little boy you won to the Lord grew up to win that whole village to Jesus Christ. Today, 40 years later, there are now 600 people in that village serving Jesus Christ because you followed the call of God in your life.”

David Flood turned slowly around until his eyes met mine – hopeful eyes, longing to believe what I told him . . . longing for the turmoil of his life redeemed in some way.”

“Papa, it’s a well known story now . . . we have a great God.”

The tears returned . . . he began to talk. By the end of that afternoon, the kindness of God had brought him back to repentance, and forgiveness and restoration of fellowship.

Aina and her husband eventually returned to America . . . a few weeks later, David Flood went home to heaven. Aina would learn that in the final hours of his life – in his delirium, he had actually begun speaking in Swahili.

Let me give you one addendum to this remarkable story.

It would be a few years later when Aina and her husband would attend an evangelism conference in London. Several leaders representing denominations and associations of believing churches throughout Africa were there to give their reports.

One report was given from the nation of Zaire by the superintendent of that national church association; he represented just over 100,000 baptized believers.

He spoke eloquently about the spread of the gospel in his country. He said, “We now have 32 mission stations; a 120 bed hospital; several large Christian schools – and our churches now have 110,000 baptized believers.

Afterwards Aina rushed forward to ask him some questions – one in particular.

I’ll let her speak from her own writing, “Sir, could you have met a young missionary couple by the name of David and Svea Flood? They were on a mission station – and all I know about it is that it was high on a hill.” “Yes madam,” he replied, “I used to sell them chickens and eggs . . . it was Svea Flood who led me to Jesus Christ.”

“And who are you?”

“I am Svea Flood’s daughter; I was born on that mountaintop.”

Tears began to run down his cheeks, he embraced me and in African style held me and began swaying with me, sobbing from the depths of his soul. “I’ve so often wondered,” he cried, “whatever happened to that little white girl whose mother died for us.”

He said to me, “You must travel back to that village – your mother is the most famous person in the history of our church.

She agreed. And after months of planning, Aina and her husband made the long journey back to the place of her birth.

They eventually arrived at the outpost where she had been given by her father to the Ericksons – the missionary couple who had worked with her parents for some time.

This was the outpost where she’d lived as a little toddler, playing in the dirt with her African friends, learning the Swahili language.

She visited the graves of her adopted parents, the Erickson’s, who were poisoned to death when she was barely 1 year old.

But eventually they drove several miles to the village her parents had desperately tried to reach. Only this time, there were hundreds of villagers waiting and cheering as she came into view – they had built arches covered with flowers for her reception.

Aina writes, “Eventually, the pastor of the village church led me up the hill, all the people following; at the top of the hill was a flat place beneath a grove of trees. The pastor pointed to it and said, “This is where your parents mud house once stood . . . this is where you were born.”

He then turned and pointed, without a word, to a simple grave, framed in cement, and over it stood a tall beautiful palm tree, overlooking the entire valley below. And marking the grave was that small white cross – and on it written, Svea Flood (1896-1923). I was standing where my mother had stood – declaring the gospel to one small boy.

Aina writes, “And now I knew the harvest of the seed she had sown.”

The pastor opened his Bible, crowded around were 100’s of believing villagers, and he read a single line from the Psalms. *Psalm 126, verse 5. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*ⁱⁱ

God knows what it means to weep. God knows what it means to suffer loss. God knows what it means to sow seed that doesn’t seem to bear fruit.

But God knows the end . . . He knows the end of the story . . . that tears of sorrow and loss and frustration and pain and grief will soon be wiped away . . . replaced by indescribable joy.

And the fruit of His gospel seed . . . you and me – the fruit of your efforts which you have no idea exist . . . along with hundreds of thousands of villagers – and David and Svea Flood and all the others we’ve been privileged to study – we, the fruit His harvest of joy – will live forever.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/15/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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i John Philips, Exploring Psalms: Volume Two (Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), p. 478

ii Excerpted from Aggie Hurst, Aggie: The Inspiring Story of a Girl Without a Country, (Access Publishing, 1986)