

BOOK REVIEW

Voorwinde, Stephen, *Jesus' Emotions in the Gospels* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2011). xiv + 255 pp. Pbk. \$34.95 USD.

*Jesus' Emotions in the Gospels* comes as a sequel to a previous book, *Jesus' Emotions in the Fourth Gospel: Human or Divine?* (2005). In this book, the author attempts to extend his study of the emotions of Jesus from the Fourth Gospel to the Synoptics. Voorwinde asks, 'Why do those who profess to follow Jesus often have such an imprecise knowledge and understanding of his emotions?' (p. 2), for which he provides two possible answers. One is that there are few direct references to Jesus' emotions in the Gospels, and another is that Jesus' emotions have been inadequately synthesized for close scrutiny. This book investigates the emotions of Jesus in the Gospels to demonstrate that 'Jesus went through deep emotional pain and spiritual trauma for the redemption of his people' (p. 217). The ultimate objective is to determine whether the *imitatio Christi* principle should be applied to the realm of emotions as it is applied to the areas of Christian morality, lifestyle and personal relationships. It is clear from start to finish that Stephen Voorwinde, Lecturer in New Testament at the Reformed Theological Seminary, Geelong, Victoria, Australia, writes from a Reformed theological viewpoint. This is most obviously seen in his portrayal of Jesus and his comments on the various passages he surveys in this book.

The book is divided into four major chapters, prefaced by an introduction that briefly describes the author's approach to the study of Jesus' emotions in the Gospels. Following Morris and Maisto (2008), Voorwinde defines emotion as 'the experience of feelings such as fear, joy, surprise, and anger...[that] activate and affect behavior' (p. 3), noting that the discussion of emotions remains complex and elusive in the discipline of psychology. As such, he acknowledges that there is always the danger of speculation, especially when it is recognized that the presentation of Jesus' emotions is spread across the Gospels.

Voorwinde also recognizes the fact that the Gospel writers have their own theological agendas and concerns that influence their particular presentation of Jesus, and that each of them speaks to different audiences as a result. For these reasons, he deems it best to study each Gospel in its own right for a more accurate presentation of Jesus' emotions. Each Gospel, according to him, is to be understood in a framework 'supplied by the complementary theologies of the four Gospels' (p. 7). The book as a whole, in my opinion, offers a unique perspective to understanding the humanity (and to some extent, the divinity) of Jesus, although some obvious pitfalls seriously undermine this unique perspective. Moreover, Voorwinde should be commended for highlighting the fact that human redemption was paid by Christ's blood on the cross. Readers, however, will perhaps wonder whether this piece of work is more theological or historical in nature, as Voorwinde, while attempting to examine New Testament texts that refer to Jesus' emotions, frequently utilizes theological arguments and comments in presenting his case.

Each chapter of the book follows a distinctive outline, consisting of three major sections—the evangelist's presentation of Jesus, commentary on the 'emotion' passages and conclusion. Voorwinde first draws attention to three identical divisions—Galilee, Journey and Jerusalem—in the Synoptic Gospels, and enumerates four preliminary observations with reference to Jesus' emotions. First, the introductory sections and the resurrection accounts of the Synoptic Gospels contain no emotions of Jesus. Secondly, three types of emotions (amazement, compassion and a stern warning) typically accompany Jesus' performance of a miracle, which mostly occurs in the Galilee section. Thirdly, emotions showing distress, anguish and sorrow are mostly confined to the passion narratives in the Jerusalem section. And fourthly, there is 'a high correlation between Jesus' emotions and his miracles and Passion' (p. 11). In comparison to the Synoptics, the author argues that Jesus' emotion in the Fourth Gospel is 'unique' (pp. 5, 151) in that the 'verbs used across the two traditions to indicate emotions of Jesus...are found in widely differing contexts' (p. 5). Throughout his treatment of the four Gospels, he uses the Greek verbs translated as 'to be amazed', 'to warn sternly', 'to have compassion', 'to love', 'to be angry', 'to weep', etc., as well as those instances in the Gospel narratives, particularly in the passion sections, that evince Jesus' emotions (e.g. he is filled with compassion, overwhelmed with sorrow, cries in dereliction,

weeping, rejoicing, etc.) as evidence for identifying Jesus' emotions. And based on these pieces of evidence, the author delves into an extensive exegetical and theological investigation of these 'emotion' passages, discussing how each Gospel writer depicts Jesus. The comments, which constitute the bulk of the book, making it look like a theological commentary, are largely gleaned from works of previous scholars.

The chapter on Matthew portrays Jesus as the compassionate king. Voorwinde claims that Matthew bridges the redemptive story from the Old Testament as the evangelist tries to show how God's covenant to Abraham and David is fulfilled through Jesus Christ. On this basis and the fact of Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit, Voorwinde deduces that Matthew's portrayal of the dual identity of Jesus provides both the matrix and the key to understanding Jesus' emotions. The chapter on Mark depicts Jesus as the 'man of sorrows' who resembles the suffering Servant of Isaiah. Voorwinde points out that Mark contains all the emotions of Jesus found in Matthew, but its portrait of Jesus is nevertheless more complex and nuanced, as Mark 'presents Jesus as having mixed emotions' (p. 60). The author, for example, highlights Mk 1.41 and 1.43, where Jesus was filled with compassion for the man with leprosy, but immediately after healing the man, he sent him away with a strong warning. The chapter on Luke, the shortest of the four, pictures Jesus as the sympathetic Son. Voorwinde indicates that Luke has the fewest references to Jesus' emotions, only six, in comparison to Matthew's ten, Mark's sixteen and John's twenty-eight. Nevertheless, Luke still offers 'a kaleidoscope of emotional colour that reaches from the very bright to the very dark. As the sympathetic Son, Luke's Jesus feels intensely' (p. 120). The author wants to emphasize the human side of Jesus, while at the same time relating his humanity to his royalty and divinity. Voorwinde cites Lk. 19.28-44 as one such example that highlights Jesus' full humanity and divinity; Jesus foreknew that the city would be overthrown, and it was for that reason, including his own death, that he wept over it.

The chapter on John, which is the longest, presents Jesus as the loving Lord. Voorwinde points out that, unlike the Synoptics, which evenly distribute Jesus' emotions in the three identical major divisions, Jesus' emotions in John's Gospel are clustered around the raising of Lazarus (ch. 11) and the Farewell Discourse (chs. 13-17), although as in the Synoptics, they are also linked to his miracles and the passion narratives. Voorwinde proposes a parabolic structure for John's pro-

logue, from which significant clues to Jesus' identity (as both perfectly human and completely divine) can be gleaned, and upon which his emotions are to be understood. He also points out that the prologue introduces Jesus as both the covenant Lord and the covenant sacrifice, both of which are seen in such emotions of Jesus as his zeal for his father's house (Jn 2.17), his love for his brothers (Jn 13.23; 19.26; 20.2), etc. The author concludes that, while Christians are not obliged to imitate Jesus' emotions, they are nevertheless to replicate them when these emotions are explicitly commanded in Scripture (e.g. Rom. 12.15; 1 Pet. 1.22; Col. 3.12).

I mentioned above that this book has some serious flaws. First, this book may lead readers to think that it relates or contributes to an understanding of the historical Jesus. However, as I have noted above, Voorwinde's objective is different. While Voorwinde seeks to link Jesus' emotions in the Gospels to his humanity and divinity based on what he has identified as 'emotion' passages from the text, his elaborate comments are more theologically oriented and, for the most part, logically disjunctive to his methodological approach to the study of Jesus' emotions. In other words, it is unnecessary to determine the types of emotions Jesus experienced to support his arguments and overall objective in the book. What is the difference between saying that Jesus was human and suffered, and arguing that Jesus experienced different types of emotions and suffered emotional trauma for our redemption? Moreover, in my opinion, one does not actually need an approach to identify 'Jesus' emotions', especially when they believe that Jesus is human. All humans have emotions, and the Gospel writers simply wanted to underline Jesus' humanity in those instances.

Secondly, Voorwinde's approach to identifying an instance of 'Jesus' emotion' is problematic. The identification of an emotion cannot be simply based upon defining 'what is an emotion', particularly when it is gleaned from verbal items or expressions that purport to convey emotions. When Jesus 'knew' what is in a person's heart or when he 'prayed', for instance, his act of 'knowing' and 'praying' must also have involved some kind of emotion. Needless to say, when Jesus delivered his teachings and parables, performed miracles and exorcisms, conversed with his disciples, argued with the religious leaders, etc., he must have had complex emotions that varied with the specific occasion also. These examples prove that human emotions are always linked to human actions just as human speech is dependent upon human cogni-

tion. The use of language cannot be separated from its user. In fact, from the standpoint of pragmatics and, more specifically, speech act theory, people use words not only to convey meaning but also to perform an *intended* action. The point is that Jesus' emotions are not confined to those Voorwinde wishes to identify.

Thirdly, the author's conclusion that Jesus' emotions are not necessarily to be replicated, unless they are explicitly prescribed in Scripture, is not only too trivial and pedantic to argue for, but it also stands on a shaky foundation. Does the author mean that Christians should not feel the same compassion, anger or distress that Jesus felt on various occasions? Does it also mean that Christian ethics based upon Jesus' emotions should be confined to the imperatives in Scripture? How does one distinguish 'Jesus, seeing the crowd, felt compassion for them (Mt. 9:36)' from 'love your neighbor as yourself' (Mt. 22:39)?

Finally, even though this book may serve as a kind of theological commentary, it does not really offer any new contribution to the study of the Gospels. Not only does it merely recount and combine previous works to support the author's case, its identification of Jesus' emotions is an endeavor that any person who reads the Bible can readily do. That Jesus was compassionate or angry and gave stern warnings are too obvious to miss from the text. It is therefore not surprising that the two previous works that have appeared over the past century on Jesus' emotions noted by Voorwinde are both devotional books. Voorwinde does not provide devotional materials, but instead asserts his view and theological arguments from the vantage point of a Reformed theological scholar.

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