

Sermon John 11 – Jesus Wept

Our text for today's study is from John Chapter 11: Jesus Wept, a total of nine characters—only two words, making it the shortest verse in the English Bible. There is infinitely more in the two words “Jesus wept” than any student of the Word will ever be able to bring out of them. Spurgeon once said, “We shall never exhaust these words. In the small window of these two words, they teach us about the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father, ourselves, and the love of Jesus Christ for us. Take your Bible and underline the words in red. Here, in this text, Jesus provides an example for us to follow, revealing the full humanity of our Lord. Psalm 30:5 says, “Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning.” Before we dig into the text, let us pause to pray.

Father God, we come into your presence so aware of our human frailty yet overwhelmed by your love for us. We thank you that there is no human experience we might walk through where your love cannot reach us. You are there if we climb the highest mountain, yet if we find ourselves in the darkest valley of life, you are there. Teach us today to love you more. Help us to rest in that love that asks nothing more than the simple heart of a child. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

The story of Jesus weeping begins earlier in John's Gospel when Jesus comforts the sisters of Lazarus, beginning in verse 17. Many people wonder how God is good in the face of tragedy. Does he understand? Does he care? The Scriptures answer the cries of our hearts beyond reason with simple words: Jesus wept. It is meant to go beyond our reason to answer a fundamental question. Does God understand? Yes, God knows. Jesus said in verse 4, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.”

What do these words teach us about Jesus? First, Jesus was indeed fully human who, on this occasion, wept. We read that Jesus was born of a woman, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and nursed like any other baby. We read that Jesus hungered and, on that occasion when he fasted for forty days in the wilderness, was tempted by Satan to turn stones into bread. Following the resurrection, Jesus ate broiled fish and a piece of honeycomb, demonstrating he had a body. He asked the woman of Samaria for a drink and then, on the cross, cried out, “I thirst.” Once, he was so tired he fell asleep in a wildly rocking boat.

We have read about the Lord's humanity in his emotions, and although he was angry at times, he differed from us in that he got angry without sinning. He showed pity in his compassion for the multitudes he termed “sheep without a shepherd.” At times, the people's hunger moved him, for he fed them in Galilee on at least two occasions. These facts from the life of Christ all speak of his humanity. Yet we compare them with the verse before us and confess that they do not speak to us as this text does. Jesus wept! A Savior who wept from the glands of his body, a Savior who became as we are so that we might become like him. He is a God who presents himself to perishing people, loving us enough to weep over us in our grief.

Secondly, Jesus experienced grief as we do. Jesus did not avoid sorrow, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy as the "man of sorrows." Whatever grief we might hold, Jesus knows it and is deeply moved, a term encompassing Christ's expression of emotion over sin, grief, unbelief, sorrow, and death. Therefore, in times of trouble, we can trust that Jesus understands and is, thus, able to comfort those who are sorrowful. And so, are you suffering? He knows it. Are you in tears? He has been there before you. Are you distressed? So was he. But a third point in this verse teaches us about Jesus. In his human form, He was not ashamed. Perhaps if Jesus would have said, "If I show my tears, my tears will be misunderstood; they will be taken as a sign of weakness." Jesus could have argued that it was foolish to cry when he was about to raise Lazarus. Why weep when rejoicing would soon honor God's resurrection glory? And so it is that in our times of grieving, Jesus is not ashamed of his humanity to identify with others, cry alongside us, and wipe away our tears.

I think we all know the story of Lazarus and that Jesus wept at his grave, and the Bible teaches us that Jesus loves. The context of Jesus' life was that he had friends in Bethany, situated outside of Jerusalem in what is now the West Bank. This family comprised two sisters, Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus. Lazarus becomes sick, and unbeknownst to the sisters, Jesus had to wait to fulfill the prophecies about the Messiah. When Jesus arrived, his friend had been dead for three days. He speaks to the sisters, who both affirmed that Jesus could heal him, and their faith that He was the Messiah had not been shaken. When Jesus saw the tears of Mary, and the sisters offered to take Him to the body, the Bible records this is when He wept.

Verse 36 of John 11 is what the people of Christ's day saw in his tears, for they observed him and said, "Behold, how he loved him!" And that provides the segue into understanding how God loves and why he weeps for us. Frankly, we do not know how to love until we understand Christ's love—reading from 1 Corinthians 7. "It always protects, always hopes, always perseveres." Unconditional love never gives up. Do you know why Jesus cried? Because God the Father weeps, too! However, while writing John's gospel, the pagan Greek thinkers believed God was thought to be above all emotions. No feelings of love, joy, sorrow, gladness, or grief because no one could have that kind of power over God. That means God must be lonely, isolated, and compassionless. Because of their legalistic religion, even the Jews lost sight of the Old Testament, revealing God as a God of love and compassion.

I'm unsure how many of you remember the beloved Christmas movie from 1947, "*It's a Wonderful Life*." An angel is sent from Heaven to help a desperately frustrated businessman by showing him what life would have been like if he had never existed. You probably remember that George Bailey (played by Jimmy Stewart) will be okay at the movie's end. I know his friends will rally around. I know Clarence will get his wings. And yet, despite knowing the outcomes, I cannot but feel the distress and the tears when the pharmacist boxes the young George's ears and causes him to go deaf in one ear. I cannot but feel the pain of Mr. Martini going in the gutter. I cannot stand it when Donna Reed (who plays Mary) tells Jimmy Stewart to leave the house. I know what will happen, but knowing the outcomes does not remove all the hurt and tears. But in Jesus, he knows the outcome of life beyond the grave.

We can dry our tears when we see Jesus, weep because we know the outcome because we, as Christians, know what death is all about. But at the same time, we have the permission to weep. We should feel death more keenly than others. We know what death is all about. We know this is not the way it was meant to happen. We know Jesus had to die to overcome this. We know death is awful, miserable, and part of the curse.

God cares. How do we know he cares? Because Jesus wept. In the 36th verse, the Jews said, “See how he loved them.” Jesus is not letting a little wet tear run down his cheek. Jesus is in obvious grief, gut-wrenching pain revealed through his tears. The fact that Jesus wept means that our Savior knows and understands grief. He experienced the agony of this dark world firsthand: rejected, abused, abandoned, mocked, cursed, tempted, and scorned. The Psalmist reminds us that he hears our cries and listens to us when we call out to him, keeping track of all our tears. Because Jesus was perfect, his tears were also perfect. Jesus’s sinless sorrows redeem our sorrows, and in the story of Lazarus, we see a God who not only cares about the sorrows of his people we see a God who can resurrect joy from the grave of despair. The story of Lazarus points to the story of Jesus’s death and resurrection and ultimately to the final resurrection, when all our tears will be wiped away forever. The Book of Revelation provides a glimpse. “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Jesus wept. Two words, though brief, are filled with great hope.

God understands. As we look to the Scriptures, we rest assured and know that God understands our pain because He knows all things. We were created to feel because God feels. He made people with emotions, and He understands those emotions. “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Ultimately, we, as believers, can be assured that Jesus understands the pain of His creation for many reasons. He gave them, created them, and feels them Himself. For those who are currently mourning, His Spirit is with them. ‘The Lord is near the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18). Jesus reaches out to those who are poor, in pain, and who suffer because He has experienced that same loss. By the time Jesus comes of age, it is implied He lost His step-father Joseph, his cousin, and prophet John the Baptist, who was beheaded. Lazarus was a good friend, and Jesus grieved. He wept, and He understood why people cry.

In closing, the holiday classic “It’s a Wonderful Life” flopped in theatres upon its release, recording a loss of \$525,000, and from that time on, Jimmy Stewart refused to work with Donna Reed ever again. It wasn’t until 1974 that the film fell into the public domain, meaning any TV station could air it for free. Over the years, the world discovered its timeless sentiment. The film now resides on the National Film Registry, only aired on NBC. The movie has a kind of ridiculous happy ending, but that is not the ending God has in mind for us; not a silly happy ending, but a joyous ending when life on this earth finally comes to a close. Know that Jesus will weep when others weep. Rest assured, Jesus cares and understands.

