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Jesus Wept John 11:33-35

Intro: There is a strange principle of biblical exposition that says that the longer the text to be taught, the shorter the amount of time necessary to deal with it. The flip side of that is also true, the shorter the text, the more time it takes. This is a fitting principle to sight as we have now come to the shortest verse in the entire Bible (35). This verse consists of only 2 words but it is of such great importance to understanding the character of Jesus Christ, who is the physical revelation of God the Father; it actually deserves to stand alone. No amount of theological study has successfully plumbed the full depths of this passage. We will never exhaust these 2 words but if we apply ourselves to this verse, we will find that it's a window through which we can see into glory.

I'll grant you that it's a very small window but if we put our spiritual eyes close enough to it, we'll see a whole lot more than we think. We will look at this verse for what it can teach us about Jesus, about God the Father and even about ourselves and the love Jesus has for us. But, before we dive into vs35, we must deal with the previous 2 verses as they serve to set up the scene and provide a background for a greater illumination of our text.

33-34- The previous verse said nothing about Mary crying but was is to be expected. This verse makes it clear that she is wailing in grief, as were the Jews who were with her. The original word signifies a loud weeping, a wailing. It was the common practice of the day to express grief in a noisy, unrestrained fashion. From the Jewish point of view, the more unrestrained the weeping, the more honor it paid to the dead. This was no gentle shedding of tears. But, the consequence of this wailing is what we want to focus on today.

The verse tells us that when Jesus "saw her (Mary) weeping, and the Jews...weeping" we are to understand that it was the sight of this unrestrained wailing that caused Jesus to groan in the spirit and be troubled. We will define this phrase later but for now, we need only notice that it was the sight of this confusion and sorrow that caused Jesus such deep emotion. Another translation says that He was deeply moved and we

should understand that Jesus was profoundly moved by this sight. The phrase “in the spirit” is not a reference to the Holy Spirit but to His human spirit.

All of this signifies that in this scene, Jesus was not feeling any light emotion but was deeply troubled.

This is a curious juxtaposition since we already know what Jesus’ original intention was for Lazarus. If He was just about to call Lazarus back from the dead and restore him to his family and friends then surely His act of mourning here was not for the dead. Neither could it be caused by any presumed hypocrisy on the part of the mourners who all seemed to be there participating out of legitimate concern for Martha and Mary. The emotions Jesus felt were real, they were appropriate but they were also purposeful.

The grief and tears of Mary and Martha moved Jesus. This tells us that God sees the tears of the grief stricken and is moved to compassion for them. Jesus here shares in the grief of those who mourned but, unlike all the others, God the Son was able to do something about their grief. Jesus will allow this sympathetic passion to uniquely do for Lazarus what He will one day do for all the righteous dead.

Now, **vs34** serves to contribute to the mystery of the Lord’s incarnation. We can see in **vs11** that He already knew Lazarus had died before leaving for Bethany, but here He has to ask where Lazarus was buried. The principle we can take from this is that our Lord never used His divine powers when normal human means would do the trick. The stories of Jesus as a little boy running around Nazareth performing miracles like bringing dead birds back to life are just that – they’re fanciful stories made up to attempt to add drama to His early life but are contradicted by the Word.

35- John uses a different word for weeping here than he used for Mary and the Jews. Their mourning was loud and demonstrative. The word used here for Jesus denotes a quiet weeping. Jesus did not wail loudly but He was deeply moved. He experience great emotional turmoil here but He was not out of control. But, our focus today is to look past the basic exposition of the passage and see what this one verse can teach us about Jesus, about God the Father and maybe even about ourselves. What does this verse have to teach us about Jesus Christ?

1) He was truly a man – for it was primarily as a man that He wept on this occasion. There are plenty of facts in the Gospels that point to His humanity and many of them are physical. He was born like every other baby, wrapped in swaddling close, was nursed by Mary. He grew up and developed both physically and mentally like any other child.

We know that He got hungry, became thirsty and was prone to work Himself to the point of being weary.

Jesus' humanity is also seen in His emotions. At times He was angry, though unlike us in most of our anger he grew angry without sinning in the process. Jesus also showed pity, as in His compassion for the multitudes He termed as sheep without a shepherd. Sometimes their hunger moved Him, for he fed them on at least 2 occasions.

All these facts from the life of Jesus speak of His humanity. Yet none of them compare with our text. Jesus wept! This tells us that His body had glands just as ours do—tear glands. It also tells us that He felt as we feel. What a Savior! He's a Savior who became as we are so that we might become as He is. Hold on to the divinity of Jesus by all means. A Savior who is not divine is no Savior at all. But while holding to His divinity, don't forget that He is also truly human; for it is specifically as a man, as well as God, that He presents Himself to a perishing humanity.

2) He experience grief – thus, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy that He would be a "man of sorrows, acquainted with grief." Jesus could've come to this earth and died for our sin without having entered into the grief that we experience, but He chose not to avoid human sorrow. So, whatever our grief may be, Jesus knows of it and has entered into it.

The phrase from [vs33](#) contains a word in the original Gk that many commentators interpret as "angry" but at what would Jesus have been angry at? The sisters, for not believing on Him fully? No, the context doesn't bear that out. The Jews, for mourning hypocritically? No for the same reason. Some contend that He was angry at the damage that sin had caused in this family but it's not like He didn't already know this. In fact, that's why He's there in the 1st place.

I believe the better interpretation is to simply say that Jesus groaned with the sisters in deep emotion, an emotion so deep that an involuntary cry was wrung from His heart. We should understand that Jesus wept with them!

What does this mean? That Jesus was acquainted with grief, as we are; that He understands it and is therefore able to comfort those who sorrow. [Heb 2:16-18](#) points to Christ's suffering as how Christians identify with Him.

It is not an impassible, insensitive, unmovable Christ that is commended to us in Christianity. It's One who has entered into our grief and who understands our sorrows. Are you suffering? He knows it. Are you in tears? He has been there before you. Are you distressed? So was He. But He went on to overcome these things so that we might overcome them through Him. Still, He is One who understands you completely and to whom you may come.

3) He wasn't ashamed to be human – He could have held back His tears rather than express them. He can do all things; He could have done this too. He had good reasons for maintaining His composure. His tears could have been misunderstood and taken for weakness ([37](#)). He could have said it was foolish to cry since He was about to raise Lazarus. He could have said tears would be inappropriate since it all would result in bringing glory to God. He could have used any of these excuses but He didn't. The sisters and their friends were weeping, He would weep with them. He knew how the story would end but in the meantime He was not ashamed to be one with His brothers.

4) He was pleased to identify with His brothers – He could have stayed cool, but He didn't. Instead, He was willing to be identified with us in all things, thus becoming our great example. Christians so often fail to do this. We are adamant in our crusades against sin but weak in our identifications with sinners. We're disturbed by the declining moral tone of our nation and we need to stand against it. But, as you cry out against corruption don't fail to weep for those caught up in it. Are you against the widespread visibility of homosexuality? Good! But as you stand up against homosexuality, don't forget to weep for the homosexual. Are you troubled by drug problem in America? Great! Fight it with every weapon you have. But as you fight drugs don't forget to weep for the victims and those who victimize.

If you don't first have an honest and true love the victims of sin, how can you ever hope to reach them with the love of Christ? It's only when we as a body of believers attempt to at least partially identify with the lost in their hopeless situation that our message of hope will be the most credible and

the most compelling.

5) He loves – that's what the crowd saw in His tears (36). Jesus had always loved Lazarus, Mary and Martha but it was His tears that convinced the onlookers of His love for them. They knew that He loved them when they saw Him weep with the sisters over Lazarus. This picture of the weeping Christ should convict us of our own cold indifference toward the lost and should compel us to bear the Gospel to them. Our hearts are cold. We can admit that. But there is an eternal flame of true love within Jesus that will quicken the hearts of the lost if we'd only expose ourselves to it.

This short verse teaches us so much about the character and nature of Jesus Christ but, if Jesus is the physical revelation of God the Father, what does this passage teach us about Him? If Jesus weeps then we can surmise that the God of the universe also weeps in the sense that He cares about us, identifies with us and shows us mercy. It teaches us that God the Father is a compassionate God. This would have been a shocking concept in Jesus' day.

Back in that day, among the Greeks, God was thought to be above all emotion. The Gk term for this was Apatheia – a total inability to feel any emotion whatever, meaning God couldn't feel anger, love, pain, disappointment, hope or any of the other human emotions. Why? The Greeks believed that if a person felt sorrow or joy, gladness or grief, it meant someone else had an effect upon them; for it is someone else who causes these emotions. If another can have an effect on him, it follows that he must also have power over him, at least for the moment. But no one can have power over God. That's impossible, and if this is so, then it must mean that God can't have feelings. He must be lonely, isolated, compassionless. He may be approached through reason, but not on the basis of love or pity.

The Jews should have known better because the OT reveals God as a God of love and compassion. But the Jews lost this concept of God as a result of the formal, legalistic religion they developed before Jesus arrived. Jehovah had become cold and distant to the Jews just as He'd always been to the Greeks. But Jesus wept and this revealed a God who enters into the anguish of His people and grieves with them in their afflictions.

It also teaches us that God is a suffering God. Now, we shouldn't assume

that when we say God suffers that it means the exact same thing as when humans suffer. For starters, when we suffer, weep, or grieve we never do so entirely in innocence. Our sorrows are linked to sin, and we're never entirely sinless in any situation. That's not true of God. If He sorrows with us, it's *because* of our sin and its consequences and never because of some sin in Him.

Plus, when we say that God suffers with us, we don't mean that there's a change in God, as if He wasn't suffering before but now suddenly grieves because of what we've done. To a certain degree, the Greeks were right. God is the eternal one. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever in whom is no variability, nor shadow of turning ([Jam 1:17](#)). So when we say God enters into our suffering we don't mean that God's ever been surprised or altered His feelings or plans because of anything we've done. Also, we must state that, while we're told that Jesus wept on three separate occasions (grave of Lazarus, over Jerusalem, Garden of Gethsemane), strictly speaking, we're never told that God the Father weeps, either in the OT or the NT. We must be careful what we infer from [11:35](#). We might say that God weeps. But we must remember that this is not true for Him precisely as it is for us.

Having said all that; this verse teaches us that God notices our tears. Vs33 tells us Jesus wept because he noticed the weeping of others. Similarly, there are plenty of verses that tell us that God the Father sees our tears, that He is not oblivious to them, that He takes notice of them. He saw the tears of King Hezekiah in II Kings 20 and added 15 yrs to his life. The point is that God heard him and He hears us when we cry out to Him. Similarly, Job declares that: "He hears the cry of the afflicted" ([34:28](#)). And David testifies: "The LORD has heard the voice of my weeping" ([Ps 6:8](#)). Others verses say that God hears, does not ignore and is attentive to our cries.

All of this means that not only does God know about our tears but He's touched by them as well. If God is genuinely touched by our sorrow, should we ever be afraid to pour out our tears before Him? Could we ever again assume that if we come to God earnestly, we will find Him unmoved? Of course, we don't want to pray foolishly but we also don't want to pray coldly, especially if we are praying for the sincere needs of another. Did Jesus weep before His loving Father? So can we, and when we do, we will find

both our tears and our prayers to be more effective.

But, not only does God notice our tears and is moved by our tears but the Bible teaches us that He remembers our tears and they are precious to Him. In **Ps 56**, David writes about all the grief he's had as the result of his enemies. They fight against him, slander him, distort his words. They hide so they can bushwhack him and destroy him. But, he cries out to God in **vs8**: "Put my tears into Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?" David's telling us that God has a bottle that He puts our tears in. It's not that David is giving his tears to God but its God who collects David's tears. If you're God's child, know that He treasures your tears and He remembers them long after you have forgotten them.

One more thing: God acts to remove our tears. In our text, Jesus wept; then He acted to restore Lazarus to his sisters. He wept, then He moved to remove the tears and bring joy to the sisters. In the same way, the Father notices our tears and then He acts to remove them. **Ps 116:8**, "You have delivered...my eyes from tears." **Ps 126:5**, "Those who sow in tears will reap in joy." **Isa 25:8**, "He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces." This last verse is mentioned twice in revelation as the final blessedness of the saints – "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (**Rev 7 & 21**). This state of being is even more blessed when we realize that it is performed by God personally. He will wipe away our tears with His own loving hands.

What does all this have to say about us? It teaches us that we are precious in God's sight but that we have gotten ourselves into such a terrible position that even God weeps over us. Above all else, it teaches us that we need God!

We are valuable to God because of how He has made us (in His image) and because of what He will make us. But, the image of God has been shattered in man; this is catastrophic both for the individual and everyone he comes into contact with. That's why we need God. We are valuable to God, but we're so marred by sin, so unable to extricate ourselves from the bondage that our sin has plunged us into that there's no hope for any of us unless God saves us

Jesus wept because Lazarus couldn't be helped by human effort. As far as

man is concerned, he is hopeless and his problems are unsolvable. But, with God, all things are possible! Jesus endured this and all suffering so that He might restore in us the perfect image of God that we had before we rebelled against Him. Here is the ability and the great love of our God. 😊