**Grace Group Study Guide**

**April 3, 2016**

He seemed composed as he approached the town. The sister of his dead friend met him outside. He consoled her with truth and grace. But then he saw the other sister, manifestly more emotional. And he burst into tears. *Jesus wept.* Just two simple words, and yet they carry a world of significance. [John 11:35](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2011.35) is the shortest verse in all of the Bible, but one of its most powerful, and insightful. Rightly was this tiniest of sentences assigned its own number. Here we find a remarkable glimpse into the glory of the Lord of the universe.

**His Human Emotions**

“A man of sorrows,” the prophet foretold, “and acquainted with grief” ([Isaiah 53:3](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2053.3)). Yes, he was a man of sorrows, but not his own. “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” ([Isaiah 53:4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Isa%2053.4)). Because his love is great, he made our pains his own.

God himself has taken on our humanity in this man. And with it, our feelings. And with them, even our sorrows. We are finite and frail. But God gave us mighty emotions. We celebrate. We grieve. We rejoice. We weep. And we do so with Jesus as one of us.

“Christ has put on our feelings along with our flesh,” writes John Calvin. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus clearly manifests human emotions. When he heard the centurion’s words of faith, “he marveled” ([Matthew 8:10](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%208.10)). And he says in Gethsemane that his “soul is very sorrowful, even to death” ([Matthew 26:38](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2026.38)). [Hebrews 5:7](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb%205.7) says he prayed “with loud cries and tears.” But no one shows us the truly human emotions of Christ like his beloved disciple John — whether it’s love or anger.

**From Love to Tears**

That he loved dead Lazarus and his two sisters could not be any more clear in John 11. Verse 5: “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.” Verse 36: The people say, in response to Jesus’s weeping, “See how he loved him!” Jesus wept not because he lacked faith, but because he was full of love. In love, he weeps with those who weep. “When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was *deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled*” ([John 11:33](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2011.33)).

And this even when he knew that Lazarus would rise. He had said to his men, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” ([John 11:4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2011.4)). And again, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him” ([John 11:11](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2011.11)). And yet, Jesus wept.

**From Anger to Tears**

But his tears are not only from his love. He has righteous anger at death and unbelief. John says he is “deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled” — literally he is outraged and unsettled. He is indignant and disturbed. The same word that is “deeply moved” here is a stern warning elsewhere ([Matthew 9:30](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%209.30);[Mark 1:43](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%201.43)), even a scolding ([Mark 14:5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%2014.5)). It’s a serious term. “In extra-biblical Greek, it can refer to the snorting of horses; as applied to human beings, it invariably suggests anger, outrage or emotional indignation. . . . It is lexically inexcusable to reduce this emotional upset to the effects of empathy, grief, pain or the like” (D.A. Carson, [John](http://www.amazon.com/Gospel-according-Pillar-Testament-Commentary/dp/0802836836/?tag=desigod06-20), 415–416). And Jesus is thus “deeply moved again” when he comes to Lazarus’s tomb in verse 38. But he is also “greatly troubled.” He is shaken up, unsettled. As he stands face to face with death, he knows what it will take to conquer this foe. This time he will take back Lazarus from its jaws. Next time he will lay down his own life.

**Here Comes Trouble**

And he will be troubled again. As his own hour comes, he prays, “Now is my soul *troubled*. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’?” ([John 12:27](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2012.27)). As he recognizes the traitor, and what it will mean, “Jesus was *troubled in his spirit*, and testified, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me’” ([John 13:21](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2013.21)).

This is a trouble that is his own to face. His disciples cannot do this with him. Indeed, he does this for them. And so he tells them, “Let not your hearts be troubled” ([John 14:1](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/John%2014.1)), and again, “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (verse 27). He will face this fear so they will be spared it.

But the love of verses 5 and 36, and the outrage of verse 33, leads then to the tears of verse 35. Because he loved, and because he stared death in the face, outraged at its evil and determined that it must not endure, he burst into tears. They had been crying. But Jesus wept.

Such tears stem from no lack of faith. This weeping is precisely the response of faith. “The same sin and death,” says Carson, “the same unbelief that prompted his outrage, also generated his grief. Those who follow Jesus as his disciples today do well to learn the same tension — that grief and compassion without outrage reduce to mere sentiment, while outrage without grief hardens into self-righteous arrogance and irascibility” (416).

**From Tears to Action**

Jesus’s weeping comes not from despair and resignation. These are not the tears of one who has realized himself powerless and is ready to give up. Rather, these are the tears of mingled affection and anger, leading to action. He will raise Lazarus.

This death will be overcome, but that doesn’t mean it will not be mourned. And his own death will be the great overcoming, but it will not be without excruciating pain. He will walk through the greatest of sorrows. He will cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ([Matthew 27:46](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matt%2027.46)). When Lazarus has been raised, he will return to the Calvary road for his final showdown with sin and death.

**He Wipes Away the Tears**

Jesus wept. And in these tears we see that God does not stand aloof to the pains of our existence. He has drawn near. He has taken our flesh and blood. He has not called us to a humanity that he himself was unwilling to take. We have not been abandoned to a world into which he was unwilling to enter. We suffer no pain he was unwilling to bear. We have no grief he was unwilling to carry. “God does not stand aloof to the pains of our existence.”

Jesus wept. He did not consider himself above our agonies, but emptied himself of privilege by taking our form, being born in our likeness ([Philippians 2:7](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Phil%202.7)). The very heart of the Christian message is that the happy God so loved our weeping world that he gave his own Son to weep with us, all the way to the place of utter forsakenness, that whosoever believes in him will not weep forever, but have everlasting joy.

And one day, when he wipes away our every tear, it is not because he is suppressing our sadness. The one who wipes away our tears has shed his own. And he has triumphed.

This is our gospel in two words. Jesus wept.

Mathis, David. “Jesus Wept.” April 16, 2015. <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/jesus-wept--2>