

Jesus Wept

John 11:32-44 (March 22, 2020)

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³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" ³⁸Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Historical Context

At the time of Jesus, it was believed that the life force of the body stayed in close proximity for 3 days. So, the statement in verse 39 that Lazarus had been in the tomb for 4 days stresses that he is beyond all hope of life. Bodies were laid in stone tombs where they underwent a year long process of putrefaction and purification as the flesh and organs rotted away. At the end of the year, the bones were then placed in a box called an ossuary and re-buried in anticipation of the general resurrection when the bones would be knit together in new life.

Theme: Jesus Wept

Helpless and hopeless is exactly how Mary and Martha felt when their brother Lazarus died. And a nagging question added insult to their injury: Couldn't God have prevented this tragedy? Jesus didn't answer their question. Instead, in the shortest verse in the entire Bible, He revealed one of the most important characteristics we can ever learn about the heart of God: "Jesus wept." The God whom Christians worship is not a remote and aloof "sky god" somewhere way out there. He's a tender God who is deeply moved, even grieved, by anything and everything that threatens our human well-being.

This compassionate nature of God is the reason why we are encouraged to bring to Him every anguish, confusion, anger, and anxiety. God doesn't only empathize with our many pains and sorrows. He also acts. Of course, human experience tells us that God doesn't act exactly when, where, and how we think He should act. So, we must wait in hope. Part of Christian maturity involves learning to wait. We ought to be confident not so much about our chances for a rosy outcome, or about exactly where, when and how God will act, but confident that He will act. We wait in hope even while we "cry out of the depths" to God. The alternative is to lose hope and to spiral into despair. Winter will not last forever; spring will come. Lenten darkness, repentance and sorrow have their rightful place with us, but Easter resurrection is our destiny.