

JESUS WEPT

What is the shortest verse in the Bible? John 11:35, “Jesus wept.” It’s a mere point of trivia that this is the shortest verse in the Bible. What I hope you remember is why Jesus wept. The 11th chapter of John records the 7th & last of the seven signs (miracles) that exemplify the theme of John’s gospel (see 20:30-31 “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples wh/ are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name”).

That 7th sign was, of course, the raising of Lazarus. So the question comes again, “Why would Jesus weep?” Remember that Lazarus was the brother of Mary & Martha. All three of them knew & loved Jesus, and He loved them. When Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead four days, and his body had already been placed into a tomb. The sister Mary came to Jesus first, saying, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” I don’t know if she was just expressing her confidence in Jesus’ ability to heal, or maybe trying to make Him feel guilty. (Maybe some of both?) Anyway, when Martha came out to Him, she fell at His feet weeping and said the exact same words: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” At that point John records that Jesus “groaned in the spirit and was troubled” (v. 33); and then v. 35 states, “Jesus wept.”

I’ve heard numerous explanations that, frankly, didn’t make a lot of sense. One was that Jesus wept because He knew He was going to bring Lazarus back from Paradise into a sinful world. While He would, indeed, raise Lazarus, nothing in this text indicates Jesus was sad about that! Another explanation said Jesus was sad because of all the unbelief among the people standing around. But I think it would be better to see this from the eyes of those who actually were there watching it. The Jews in the very next verse exclaimed, “See how he loved him!” I think they understood it. Jesus was sharing in the grief of the two sisters who obviously

loved their brother (whom Jesus also loved), and were mourning his death. He was doing what the inspired apostle Paul would later write, “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). There’s an old saying that the simplest answer is usually correct. I think it applies in this case.

But do you remember two other times Jesus wept? It wasn’t very long after the raising of Lazarus that Jesus made His “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem. “Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it” (Luke 19:41). So, again, we ask, “Why?” This time the answer is more definite. Jesus lamented, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you, and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone left upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation” (vv. 42-44). Jesus had come, He had taught the truth, He had confirmed it all with innumerable miracles – yet for the most part His own people had rejected Him. As a result, within one more generation, God would send the Roman army to destroy the city. Jesus knew full well the carnage that would ensue, and it broke His heart.

Finally there are the tears Jesus shed in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Gospel accounts don’t mention it, but Hebrews 5:7 speaks of “when He had offered up prayers & supplications w/ vehement cries & tears to Him who was able to save Him from death.”

What does all of this teach us? All three incidents demonstrate the love of Jesus. When you are in a time of grief, as the old hymn says, “Oh yes, He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief.” But He also cares about our spiritual condition. Our sins disappoint Him and move Him to tears! But His love motivated Him to take our sins upon Himself. His tears in the garden didn’t result

in avoiding the cross. Instead, “though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things wh/ He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Heb. 5:8-9).

Yes, Jesus wept! He wept in sympathy for grieving friends. And He wept over sin, and wept in dread of the ordeal He would experience in providing a remedy for our sin. Anyone who tells you “Real men don’t cry” needs to take a long, hard look at Jesus. We ought to thank God for such a Savior!