

# John 11:28-38 “The Tears of God in the Face of Death”

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Praise the Lord. Thank you. Hallelujah. What a Savior. Can you just try to wrap your mind around that for a minute?

How amazing it is that the Son of God Himself, the Prince of Heaven, would come to earth not as a famous celebrity, but when He shows up here, would show up as a man of sorrows.

Isaiah said He would be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. It's one of the most glorious realities about Jesus, isn't it?

We're going to marvel at it this morning in our passage in John chapter 11. Last week, we started looking at this story of Lazarus' death and resurrection.

[ 1 : 20 ] And we considered the reality of death that surrounds not only this story, but also in very personal and deeply impactful ways surrounds all of our lives.

And we also saw the presence of Jesus who promises wherever He is, there is resurrection and life. And we'll rejoice in that again next week as Jesus brings Lazarus out of the tomb. But first, Jesus, after a delay, comes to Bethany and Lazarus' grieving sisters.

And when the King of life is faced with death, how does He respond? What does He feel?

What will our God do? We're going to read beginning at verse 28 of John 11. Kids, I especially want you, as always, to be looking at a Bible.

[ 2 : 30 ] If you will look at a Bible this morning as I'm reading, I want you to look out for the shortest verse in the whole Bible. Right in the middle of this passage is the shortest verse in the whole Bible, okay?

See if you can find it. It won't last long. Read with me God's holy word. When Martha had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, the teacher is here and is calling for you.

And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to Him. Now, Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met Him. When the Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Now, when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet, saying to Him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

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.

[ 3 : 50 ] And He said, where have you laid Him? They said to Him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. So the Jews said, see how He loved Him.

But some of them said, could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying? Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb.

It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. And did you see verse 35? Good.

Jesus wept. Though it's the shortest verse in the Bible, kids, that doesn't mean it will be the shortest sermon about the shortest verse in the Bible.

Okay, I don't want to disappoint you. Okay? Though it is the shortest verse in the Bible, it is also one of the most comforting and most hopeful verses in all the Bible.

[ 5 : 05 ] We're going to contemplate it together this morning to encounter Jesus. So let's ask God to help us with that because nothing, nothing in all our lives is more important than knowing and loving and trusting Jesus.

Right? Let's pray and ask for God's help with that. Father, would you, by your Spirit, meet with us this morning?

Jesus, as you did with Mary and Martha, bringing your comfort to those who are grieving, would you meet with us?

Would you show us your heart? might it within us well up in worship, in gratitude, in comfort, in love for you.

We ask it in your name. Amen. Amen. I've really been overwhelmed this past week.

[ 6 : 15 ] By the way, sorry, I know it's weird. I'm sitting down here. Just acknowledge the weirdness. I'll be here for a little while. Just remarking at the impact of tears in our lives, of how death has invaded each of our stories in a lot of different ways.

I've listened to the staff, to my grace group, to many of you individually sharing, as Aaron shared some with us this morning, of how death has impacted our stories.

And just overwhelming to consider how much sorrow is in this one room. There are too many tears in this room this morning for me to count.

Way more than I know about. And I want us to sit in that a bit this morning, as hard and uncomfortable as that sometimes can be for us, but to sit in the glorious reality that Jesus wept.

We need to ponder the tears of God. That God cries with us and let them soak deep into our hearts.

[ 7 : 47 ] Before we do that specifically, let me address briefly calling them tears of God. Many focus here in this passage on Jesus' showing us His full humanity.

In fact, His perfect humanity as He weeps. And that is certainly true. But, we should never separate that true humanity from His true, full divinity.

In fact, in John's Gospel, Jesus primarily reveals God's character to us, making known to us the God we have not seen.

Right? Showing us not merely godly humanity, but especially in fleshed divinity. That's what Jesus is doing here.

Jesus certainly exemplifies what a godly man is. But here, He particularly reveals to us the heart of God. God, of course, God the Father does not have physical tears, but He is full of emotion.

[ 9 : 04 ] He's not distant and unfeeling, as many have imagined or asserted, or as you may have felt when you were hurting. When we see Jesus' tears, we see the heart of God.

Okay? And that is, that is so important to me because what I want us to feel this morning is the God of the distant heavens being incredibly near to us.

That He understands you and you can, at least in this bit of Him, understand Him. Especially now and especially in our tears.

Part of a growing relationship with God is understanding His emotions, learning how He feels about us and life and death.

So I pray this morning that the tears of God will help you love the heart of God more. There's much that has been written, much that could be said about the tears of God in this passage.

[ 10 : 18 ] But the text itself highlights at least three emotions that are pictured in Jesus' tears. Let's start right where we're already reflecting with God's tears of empathy.

God cries with us which means we never cry alone. never. Notice Mary, she falls at Jesus' feet weeping, right?

She throws herself at His feet and there are others behind her also. It's that moment that immediately prompts Jesus' strong emotions culminating in His tears.

tears. We'll come back to the words for deeply moved and greatly troubled but for now notice what touches Jesus' heart.

It's their tears. Many of us have felt this. Nothing makes us cry faster than what? Someone else crying.

[ 11 : 34 ] Martha speaks about her hope. She comes to Jesus with the same words as Mary does. Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

But then she speaks about her hope and so Jesus responds with words of hope, with promises for her. Mary starts with those very same words tears.

But she ends in tears. And Jesus responds how? With tears. Empathy for her.

Maybe you've felt that way that Mary felt. God, I know the hope but I'm hurting now. That's where I am. In fact, what I'm feeling right now is why did you let this happen?

If you had just been here Jesus, it didn't have to be like this. Don't you care? Jesus says, oh yes, I know.

[ 12 : 45 ] I care. Come here. Let me weep with you. I've talked with enough of you to know that most of us in here have shed tears at the grave of a loved one or in their hospital room or maybe at their funeral service.

We need to know Jesus has too. Jesus tears at the grave of a loved one.

Isn't that good? Don't we need to know it's not wrong? it's not a lack of faith. He's not hoping that we'll hold it together.

He's not disappointed that we're sad. Friends, weeping in the face of death does not indicate that you don't find hope in the promises of Jesus.

It's not what it means. Jesus knows for sure that he's about to raise Lazarus, doesn't he? He's said it twice already. But right here, right now, there's pain, anguish, ache with those who are grieving.

[ 14 : 12 ] And we may wonder why didn't if Jesus was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, why didn't he just skip the tears and make it all better? I've learned this slowly, but sometimes making a bad situation better begins with sharing the pain of how bad it really is.

So here the king with all the power in the world, the one who is himself, the resurrection and the life, the word who breathed life into mankind once upon a time, enters our weakness, shares our pain, sheds our tears.

Even though he knows he will wipe all tears away one day, right? He knows they're rightfully worth being cried today, this day.

He knows that even though Lazarus is coming back from the dead, there will be more tears to come and that's why he doesn't rush ahead and he doesn't skip to the hope, but he cries in the pain.

You're right to be sad, he says. Death really is awful. I'm broken hearted too.

[ 15 : 54 ] It's so important to see the badness of bad like death and our Savior is helping us with that.

Our merciful and faithful high priest sympathizes with our weaknesses, right? It's what called us in to worship him this morning. In fact, he has borne our griefs, carried our sorrows, talk about empathy.

He knows your personal pain intimately. His heart is moved by your grief.

As the psalmist reminded us earlier, he has collected your tears, not overlooked a one of them. He's counted them all.

The tears in this room may be too many for me to count. They are not too many for Jesus to count. He knows every single one. The tears that drop unseen and unnoticed from your eyes are always seen.

[ 17 : 08 ] Never forgotten by him. Aren't you so thankful? Aren't you so glad that those tears you thought nobody would see, he sees.

Listen to how the Puritan pastor Octavius Winslow describes what is happening here when Jesus weeps. the creator of all worlds, the author of all beings, the upholder of the universe, raining tears of human woe and sympathy upon a grave.

Oh, there lives not a being in the universe who can enter into our bereavement with the sympathy, the support, and the soothing of Christ.

brothers and sisters, Jesus is the one who designed our tear ducts, who shaped our hearts to choke up sometimes, who formed our bodies to experience and to express deep emotion, yet he dwelt in a place of perfect peace, peace, of total joy, of no tears.

Jesus could theoretically have remained distant, shut his ears to our cries, clung to the riches and the comfort and the happiness of heaven.

[ 18 : 44 ] He could have, but he didn't. the word became flesh.

He came near. He carried our sorrows. He cried our tears. Man of sorrows.

That same Jesus who wept at Lazarus' grave weeps with us. I know now with a glorified body, but still if Thomas could touch his same hands and side, we can see the same sorrowful eyes.

We can catch his tears that fell outside Lazarus' tomb weeping with us. What great comfort.

He cries with us and he sends us to comfort others with the comfort with which we have been comforted, which I believe here means weeping with those who weep.

[ 20 : 10 ] Empathy can be hard. you don't always feel the exact same emotions as someone else. You go to a visitation or to a hospital room and you don't know what to say, do you?

You may have to travel a great physical or quite likely emotional distance to share someone else's tears.

tears. But when you do, what a gift. How God-like. How helpful in showing his heart.

So what a privilege it is that you get to do that, to weep with those who weep. Yes, we know the one who one day will fix it all and wipe away all the tears.

But that is one day. And today we know that same one and we know he weeps with us.

[ 21 : 20 ] See his heart. Trust his care. Rest in his tearful embrace.

God's tears of empathy. Secondly, we see God's tears as tears of anger.

Certainly Jesus was filled with compassion, with empathy, but the words used to describe his emotions that lead to the tears are clearly stronger.

harsher. He is greatly troubled, disturbed, unsettled, stirred up like troubled waters.

Can you picture that? And he's deeply moved. That translates a word that refers to the snorting of a horse that's upset and wants to get at something.

[ 22 : 29 ] The dust is stirred up underneath it. anger, if it's our selfish rage when we don't get our way that we're thinking about may not help us here.

But righteous indignation I think helps paint the picture for us. Jesus likely audibly can't stand what he's faced with.

deep deep in his heart we're told he's stirred up with indignation at what? Well simply stated at death.

Some have said he's angry with Mary and the Jews for their unbelief. I don't think that fits well here.

To the extent that his anger is connected to unbelief it's the darkness of death and the power that it holds over people that would anger him.

But both times we're told Jesus is deeply moved it's connected to death. Lazarus has died we're told.

[ 23 : 51 ] They weep. Jesus is stirred up and says where have you laid him? Then as his tears begin to flow they take him to the tomb itself face to face with death where again verse 38 Jesus is deeply moved.

The great Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield says what moved Jesus was the evil of death. It's unnaturalness it's violent tyranny.

He famously wrote of this passage Jesus burns with rage against the oppressor of men. It is death that is the object of his wrath and behind death him who has the power of death and whom he had come into the world to destroy.

tears of sympathy may fill his eyes but his soul is held by rage and he advances to the tomb as a champion who prepares for conflict.

He's quoting John Calvin there at the end. It is as though when he asks where have you laid him Jesus is saying where is death let me at him just wait till I get my hands on him he goes right to the enemy doesn't he Jesus doesn't make friends with death he doesn't expect us to do so he hates it it is after all the pinnacle of the curse that has so wrecked his gloriously perfect creation the author of life the lord of life the giver of life is indignant in the face of death he hates that it torments his beloved creatures the creator the sustainer the king of all things is indignant in the face of death he rejects it as an unwelcome intruder into his world and graciously and gloriously he is ready to fight back as our champion in fact he has come to make blessing flow far as the curse is found and he sees the curse and he wants to bring blessing he hates the separation that death brings he made us for relationships for relationship with himself for love that lasts for life that flourishes and death has no place in his good creation or in his new creation by the way friends aren't you glad your

[ 26 : 54 ] God hates death too doesn't it do your soul good to know there are times it is right to be angry that God rages at the ways the curse breaks this world just as you do might it not inspire you to charge toward this great enemy and other enemies with righteous indignation to bring his blessing to those who are suffering injustice and despair and death our God is not distant he's not dispassionate he's not disappointed he's not this deity who's up there thinking oh that is so sad but I just don't care to get involved he's not the one who doesn't care how you feel he's not unmoved by what you're facing he weeps tears of empathy and tears of anger and ultimately tears of love love is what the people around him saw when they saw

Jesus weeping I think I'm going to sit down again verse 36 see see how he loved him see the deep affection that Jesus had for his friend they see it he can't bear being separated from him can he

John already told us Jesus loved Lazarus his love for these three siblings is a big part of this story notice it again when he calls Mary personally and he wants to talk with her wants to weep with her Martha go tell Mary privately that I want to see her God is not cold hearted nor is he lukewarm towards you he's not even hot and cold about you based on how you're doing today he loves you passionately personally persistently he calls you by name to weep with you when you weep the great

British preacher of the last century Charles Spurgeon said of Jesus here there was no flint in his heart he was love and only love and through his love he descended into the depths of grief with the beloved ones whose lot was sorrowful and he carried out to the full that sacred precept weep with them that weep there's not much sweeter truth than the truth many of us learned as kids Jesus loves me this I know the Bible certainly tells us so doesn't it here the Bible tells us and shows us the love of Jesus as the tears of the God who could love anyone and anything in his entire creation flow for us his tears for his beloved sheep his adopted children his tears flow for us

I hope that is sinking in deep for you the crowd of the tomb gets it right see how he loved him but I don't think they get the half of it they mean Jesus is sad because he's separated by death from his friend whom he loves and that's true but putting together the emotion that we have seen in Jesus this morning Jesus is surely moved to tears at our suffering the effects of the curse at the brokenness of this life that we weren't created to endure and it moves him to action on our behalf doesn't it on behalf of those he loves Jesus enters in to face death for us to deliver us from it and they thought


I loved you then huh just wait till the cross see how he loved him and me and you Jesus looks death in the face and is saddened that it separates him from those he loves so he makes sure once and for all that this will not happen anymore is your heart moved with love for the hurting the broken hearted those whose death could eternally separate them is your heart moved with love like his is may God transform us more and more into the likeness of his son with empathy with anger and with love love the next time you weep before the grave of a loved one

[ 33 : 39 ] I want you to remember that God cries with you I want you to remember that God hates death with you I want you to remember that God loves you so much that he conquered death the only obstacle to his being with you now and being with you forever Jesus wept and we are comforted forever hallelujah what a savior Jesus sat with the disciples he loved on another night when he would weep in the face of death and they sat down to share a meal together that celebrated

God's deliverance of his people into relationship with him and on that night when he would be betrayed Jesus took bread and he broke it and he gave it to his disciples as I ministering in his name give this bread to you he said take and eat this is my body given for you do this in remembrance of me then in the same way after supper he took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of sins drink from it all of you for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes you proclaim God's deliverance of his people into relationship with him in this case now not by the blood of the lamb on the doorpost but by the blood of the lamb of God poured out on the cross covering your heart those who partake of this table proclaim the death of Jesus until he comes in other words if you understand and believe that Jesus filled with empathy for you filled with anger at sin and death filled with love for you went and faced death and conquered death to forgive your sins so that you would never face death without him come and eat and share in his victory and celebrate it with us look forward to the day when there will be no more tears and we will eat this meal with him forever because he looks forward to that day if that's not you if that's not how you feel if that's not what you believe if that's not what you see in this table yet then don't come and take these elements this morning they point us to

Jesus they tell us about who he is but God warns us against partaking of them if that's not what we believe they are if that's not what is true in our hearts that we're trusting him to take death for us but while warning us against taking these elements he invites us to see in them his amazing love so we would invite you this morning to come and see if you prefer to stay where you are and observe or if you would like to come and ask us to pray with you but to come not to elements that point us to Jesus and represent him to us but we would love for you to come to the real Jesus himself who loves us and weeps with us and gives his life for us let's pray and then we'll come and celebrate together Jesus how many ways you have come near to us today in your word read and preached

and now in your word seen and touched and tasted

Holy Spirit would you use very common elements for a very sacred purpose that we would feel the presence of God as we eat and drink with him that we would know his love for us do that now we ask in his name amen for more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://southwood.org) OFF life with  \$ 100