

Why Tears Will Turn to Joy

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

It is such a joy for us to open God's Word together on this wonderful day and to see what God has for us. So John 11 is where we'll be and where I'm excited for us to learn together this morning. So John 11, I'm going to begin reading in verse 1 if you'll look there with me. Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sister sent to him, saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill.

But when Jesus heard it, he said, 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.

[1 : 14] Verse 5, now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard of Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this, he said to the disciples, let us go to Judea again. Hop down to verse 17. Now when Jesus came, he found Lazarus, had already been in the tomb four days.

Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.

Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.

Jesus said to her, your brother will rise again. Martha said, I know, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.

[2 : 25] But Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Do you believe this? She said to him, yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world. Verse 28, when she 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.

Verse 32, now, when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying, 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.

He says, where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. But some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind also have kept this man from dying?

[3 : 55] Verse 38, then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, take away the stone. Martha, the sister of the dead man, said, Lord, by this time there will be an odor for he's been dead four days.

Jesus said to her, did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God? So they took away the stone and Jesus lifted his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me.

I know that you always hear me. But I said this on account of the people standing around that they may believe that you sent me. When he said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out.

The man who died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go.

It's the word of God. What a fabulous passage for us to study this morning. No music breaks your heart like country.

[5 : 07] Rock and roll sings about making love, getting high and partying down. But country sings about pain and life. About marriages breaking, fathers leaving, friends dying, people staring into the bottom of a shot glass and a honky tonk.

And sons going off to war. No music breaks your heart like country. And no country breaks your heart like George Jones. George Jones was famously the wife of Tammy Wynette.

And let's just say they had a bit of a rocky relationship. Divorced and remarried no less than five times. And Jones sang with all his heart and soul.

You can feel him through the speaker. And he sings songs that just break your heart. None more so than he stopped loving her today. This song is about a guy who loved a girl who didn't love him back.

And we men know that story, right? You know, the first verse, he says, I love you until you die. Or until I die. And she told him, you'll forget in time.

[6 : 17] He says, as the years went slowly by, she still preyed upon his mind. The song continues and his life continues. He kept her picture on his wall. He kept her letters by his bed with every I love you underlined in red.

And the song keeps going and keeps getting sadder and sadder. He can't stop loving her. But finally he does when he dies.

And the chorus says, he stopped loving her today. There's a wreath upon the door. Soon they'll carry him away in his casket. He stopped loving her today. And if that doesn't make you want to cry, I can't help you.

Jones was the king. He came to be known as the king of country. But also as the king of tears. This morning we come to another king of tears this morning in our passage.

I mean, in so many ways this passage gives us a look into who Jesus is. I mean, what do you think Jesus was like? We know he was meek and mild and fits nicely on our felt board.

[7 : 28] But was he fun to be around? Was he one of the good guys you wanted to be like? But one of the good guys you could never be like? One of those rule followers trying to stop anyone having a good time?

Was he a workaholic? Or could he lay down in the grass in the hot sun? How would you feel about Jesus Christ if you met him and walked with him and talked with him?

You know, the gospels, they seek to give us a full picture of who this Jesus was. How he lived and how we can find life in him. But John's gospel seeks to give us something else. John Calvin says all the canonical gospels, all the gospels in our Bibles, they seek to give us one object, Jesus Christ.

And all three or three of them exhibit his body. They tell you kind of who he is in his body. But John shows us his soul. So all the other gospels, the synoptics, they show us his body.

They show us what he did. But John shows us his soul. John shows us what he thought, what he felt, what he agonized over, what he longed for, what drove him.

[8 : 33] And there may be no passage in John's gospel that we see more of his soul than this one. It's in this story that our Savior's heart is laid bare. There's any questions about what our Savior thinks or feels or longs for.

It's right there. He loves. He groans. He boils within. He's wonderfully emotional. He weeps. He's got more heart than George Jones.

And he came to do something about it. And the word where we're going is Jesus will turn all tears to joy and new and never-ending life. Jesus will turn all tears into joy and new and never-ending life.

We're just going to unpack this in three points. Jesus is not indifferent to your sorrow. Jesus is not indifferent to your sorrow. As I just said, Jesus' emotions are all through this passage.

They're on full display. In so many ways, this passage is wonderfully organized around the emotions of Jesus Christ. If you look down at verse 3, he says, or Mary says to him, the sisters say to him, He whom you love is ill.

[9 : 41] Verse 5, kind of matter-of-factly. Now, Jesus loved Mary and Martha. And so we think, what does it mean that Jesus loves them? And we know that love is not an emotion, but it does include it.

I think this idea is it's not cold. It's not distant. It's not indifferent. Love is this emotionally warm, personal regard for others that overflows and doing them good.

And so Jesus loves Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. He likes them too. He's their friend. He's personally attentive to them.

We see this throughout the Gospels. I was reading just this morning in John 20 when Jesus appears to Mary in the tomb. She goes in there. She sees the two angels. She says, where's my Lord? And then the Lord's there.

And he kind of shields himself so that they don't see him. They say, who are you looking for? And they said, I'm looking for the Lord Jesus Christ. Something along those lines. And he just says, Mary. He doesn't say, I'm risen.

[10:45] He doesn't say, I'm here. He says, Mary. That's the way he would greet you this morning. He loves his disciples. Mary and Martha know this.

They humbly ask him for help. Lord, the one you love is ill. But that's not all. Look in verse 33. Gives us another window into this love that he possesses.

When Jesus came and they were weeping and he saw them weeping, he was deeply moved. And then in verse 35, which all our scripture memory loves, because we can memorize this scripture very easily, Jesus wept.

The shortest verse in our Bibles, and yet maybe one of the most profound. Jesus' love for Mary and Martha and Lazarus led him back to Judea and back in no harm's way. But it didn't stop there.

When he arrived and when he saw how sorrowful they were, he wept. He wept. A couple of years ago, I saw a playful video between a husband and wife sitting on the couch.

[11:41] And the husband or the wife begins to talk and the camera only shows a little bit of her. And she's talking about this pressure in her head. And she can literally feel the pressure. And then the camera kind of pans out.

And you see the wife has this nail sticking out of her head. And so the husband does what husbands normally do. And they say, say, honey, do you think the pressure is because you have this nail sticking out of your head?

And she responds, it's not about the nail, honey. And I don't want you to try to fix it. You always try to fix it. I just want you to listen. And then the video kind of continues.

And he does. He just listens. She starts saying, all these strange things are happening. I'm not sleeping well. I'm getting headaches. All my sweaters are getting snags in them. It's just so hard living with this pressure right now.

And the husband kind of reluctantly responds, that sounds very hard. I'm so sorry. To which the wife says, it is hard.

[12:39] Thank you for understanding and not trying to fix. Now, maybe this would solve all our communication problems in our life. Well, Jesus came to take the nail out. But first he pauses to listen.

He pauses and stops. He listens and weeps. I mean, we've just got to hold on to the gravity of these verses.

He's going to the cross. And yet he saves time to weep with these women. Now, before we keep going, we've got to step back and capture the wonder of these verses.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God and was made man to show us the depths of love and compassion in God. The Westminster Catechism of Faith, which you do not have, but I'll recite it for you.

When it says, what is God? It just says, God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, unchangeable. And his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. And just to set up Jesus' emotions, we've got to understand this.

[13:39] God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. This is the idea that I've said a lot. He has no needs, has no lack, he has no beginning, no end. He never changes. He never sleeps or eats or drinks or rests or becomes weak or annoyed or changes his mind from everlasting to everlasting.

He is God. The theologians say he's immutable. He's unchangeable. He has no volatility and up and down to his emotions. And we see it in his wisdom, his power, and his holiness.

The idea is that all those things about him are infinite in every way. But if we look at this definition, it says he's infinite, eternal, unchangeable in his justice, goodness, and truth as well.

These qualities are different. They describe the way God relates. What he likes and dislikes. What he defends. What he gives.

The way God feels. They describe God not merely as a higher power in the sky, but as a person.

And this is huge. The eternal God is described throughout the scriptures in a radically personal way.

[14 : 50] Isaiah 40 says he'll tend his flock like a shepherd. He'll gently lead them. Zephaniah 3 says the Lord your God is in your midst. The mighty one to save. He'll rejoice over you with gladness.

He'll quiet you with his love. He'll exalt over you with loud singing. Now these verses are so wonderful and so tender, but what do they mean? Is this just a metaphor?

Therefore, how could God who never changes have emotions that rise and fall? How could God who never changes be described as tender?

The answer is God is not a higher power or cool concept. God's not a big being in the sky or an unseen order to the universe. God is a person. In fact, he's three persons.

The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. And the Son became man in Jesus Christ to show us the depth of love and compassion in God.

[15 : 53] Just these metaphors were not enough. That's what's going on here. The metaphor that God is tender with you is not enough. God sent Jesus Christ to let you know how tender he is.

He loves. He weeps. He shows compassion. We may be tempted to say with the psalmist, there's no one who takes notice of me.

No one cares for my soul. No one cares for me. No one understands. There's no one I can talk to about this secret, this guilt, this filthy feeling of what I've done or this failure.

We may be tempted, but no longer after Jesus Christ. We don't have a high priest who's unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who is tempted in every respect as we are yet without sin.

Therefore, he lives to give grace and mercy to us in our time of need. And it's even better for us now. Jesus has ascended. He said it was better for him to go to the Father.

[16 : 53] He's ascended to the right hand of the Father. And because he no longer carries the frailty of human flesh, he no longer weeps. So there are no tears in heaven. That is not our comfort, that God cries in our pain now.

But Jesus still listens. Jesus still prays. Jesus still gives mercy and grace in our time of need.

What has happened to you that he does not understand? What has happened to you that he cannot help with? What has happened to you that his prayers don't make all the difference?

Robert Murray Machane said, if I could hear Jesus praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference. He's praying for me.

How do you think it made Peter feel when Peter says, Satan demanded to have you and sift you like wheat, but I prayed for you. Well, he's praying for you. That's what it means. God's not indifferent.

[17 : 52] Are you kidding me? He sent his son. Point two, Jesus is not just sorrowful. He is consumed with rage at sin and death. Jesus is not just sorrowful.

He's consumed with rage at sin and death. Jesus is angry. I mean, it probably stood out to you as I was reading verse 33 and verse 35. It said he was deeply moved in his spirit and then he was deeply moved again.

Now, this word is difficult to translate. In numerous translations, translate it different ways. He was groaning or he was greatly disturbed or he was deeply angry or he was moved with indignation, a word we rarely, if ever, use.

But those aren't complete. The idea is Jesus was enraged. Jesus was enraged. B.B.

Warfield tells us, Jesus approached the grave of Lazarus in a state not of uncontrollable grief, but of irrepressible anger.

[18 : 56] Jesus approached the grave of Lazarus, not in uncontrollable grief, but in irrepressible anger. Yes, Jesus wept, but the emotion which tore his breast and clamored for utterance was just rage.

Just rage. I don't know what your understanding of Jesus Christ is, but it might not align with this passage. Why was he angry? Now, was he angry at the weeping of Mary and her friends?

Did he think them impatient and concluding he was done too early? No, no. Did he think their faith was weak and they were facing death without courage? Did he think they were failing to believe?

I don't think that's it at all. I think the idea is Jesus looked at their tears and then he looked further through their tears to what one author calls the tyranny of sin and death and becomes enraged.

B.B. Warfield helps us again to explain this. It is death that is the object of his wrath and behind death him who has the power of death and whom he has come into the world to destroy.

[20 : 08] Tears of sympathy may fill his eyes, but this is incidental. His soul is held by rage and he advances to the tomb and Calvin's word as a champion prepares for the conflict.

Jesus came to destroy death. So when he sees their tears, he looks beyond their tears to the enemy that causes their tears who he's come to destroy.

Jesus is not just meek and mild. He's not just sorrowful. Well, he's consumed with rage at sin and death and willing to go to the end to right that wrong. One kind of gospel story I really like and I was going to quote today, but it's from 8th century.

These Germanic tribes, kind of rebel rousing, crazy men. They put the gospel to a poem. And, you know, it would fit more with a bar than it would with church.

You know, it fit more with that type of scene. And they say when Jesus was at the last supper that when he took the bread and then when he took the wine, he drank it down to the dregs.

[21 : 19] You know, kind of like Clint Eastwood in Unforgiven before he went in to take over. You know, it's this type of passion to right wrong that drives him in so many ways.

And that's what he's come to do. Now, I just want to say two things here. You know, it would be wrong for Jesus Christ to stand in the presence of wrong without being emotionally affected. It would be wrong for Jesus Christ to stand in the presence of wrong without being emotionally affected.

It would be wrong if Jesus stood at the tomb of Lazarus indifferently. It would not be right. It would be deeply offensive. Now, the Bible never says God is wrath.

The Bible never says God is anger. God is love. God doesn't have to be provoked to love. But in moments like these where he sees sin and death and all the wreckage it causes, God is provoked to anger and wrath.

And it would be wrong if he wasn't. Not all anger is bad anger. Jesus is and should be righteously angry. If he wasn't, he would be unworthy of worship.

[22 : 31] And Jesus, if you notice, he holds his anger righteously. So he's righteous in it, but he holds it thoroughly righteously. He was deeply moved in his spirit. He's not flying off the handle and he's not losing his temple.

And the point I want to make here is God's not neutral to your pain. I remember years ago after we had, I think, our third miscarriage. And I was talking to a friend of mine.

And we were still grappling with the reality of losing a baby. And a friend of mine prayed for me over the phone. And he just said, Lord, I thank you that you hate miscarriages. And I'd never thought about that.

And it just hit me like a ton of bricks. That's exactly right. You hate sin. You hate death. That's the truth.

God hates sin and death. He hates the way it affects you. It hates the way it affects me. He may bring good purposes out of horrible things. But make no mistake, God hates those things.

[23 : 39] God hates what this world has become. Not in an irrational way. Not in a way that eclipses his love. But in a way, nevertheless, it preserves what was supposed to be a wonderful world lived in communion with him.

And second point for us is it's wrong for us to stand in the presence of wrong without being emotionally affected. I think this passage, just a side product that I can't spend a lot of time on. Jesus wants to rewire our emotional lives. Jesus wants to rewire what we feel. That we don't just weep about our hurts, but weep over a thousand hurts.

That we would be, in some way, sorrowful, yet always rejoicing because of the world we're in. It's wrong to be unemotional about racial slurs and child abuse and disrespect of parents.

Objectification of women and cancer and unexpected death. It's wrong. Jesus Christ taught us how to live. Point three, Jesus is not just angry.

[24 : 50] He conquers sin and death for all those who trust him. Jesus is not just angry. He conquers sin and death for all those who trust him. What does he do with this anger, right?

Irrepressible anger. Well, we see in this passage. Look down at verse 38. He walks to the tomb. Deeply moved again.

He came to the tomb. It was a grave. A stone laid against it. Very directly, he said, take away the stone. Mary, the sister of the dead man, said, Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.

Now, every detail in this passage is very carefully put together. If you notice from the beginning, there's kind of this reference on time. Lord, he's going to die. And Jesus waited two more days. And then now he's in the grave. He's been dead four days. So somehow he died two days after Jesus began making his ascent to Judea. Why? Why? Because four days was an important time period in which the Jews believed the soul had already passed into Sheol.

[25 : 58] But Jesus steps forward and takes away the stone. Then he prays like Elijah before the prophets of Baal.

Come on, Lord, do what only you can do. And then he calls Lazarus out with a word. Look back down there. He said, Lazarus, come out. The man who died, his hands and feet, bound with linen strips and his face wrapped in a cloth, Jesus said to him, unbind him and let him go. Jesus raises Lazarus as a sign for all those who trust in him. Now, John's gospel, and we don't have time to unpack all these things, it's filled with signs. The first 12th chapter are often called the book of signs.

And then chapter 12 through 13 through 24 is called the book of glory. And so the first 12 chapters, it has six signs in it. The water and the wine, the healing of the official son, the feeding of the 5,000 and so on and so on.

And the idea is each sign is to be a miracle. More than that, each sign is meant to be significant. It reveals who Jesus Christ is so that people might believe that he's the son of God.

[27 : 07] But this sign is different. It's the last sign. It transitions to the book of glory because it reveals what he came to do. And so Jesus plucks Lazarus out of the grave, already dead, to show the world he came to conquer sin and death once for all.

And so he said in these breathtaking words in verse 25 and 26, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet he shall live.

And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Now, what's going on in that passage? It sounds like he's saying the same thing twice. I think the idea is that those who are physically dead but believe will only sleep.

Lazarus. He's physically dead at this moment. And they'll only sleep. Those who are physically alive and believe will only sleep. The idea is that everyone who believes will only sleep.

Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ will never die. Why? Pastor Donald Gray Barnhouse, longtime pastor in 10th Perez in Philadelphia, was trying to explain this reality to his daughter years ago.

[28 : 21] His wife had died while his daughter was still young. And he was trying to help his little girl process the loss of her mom. He's the pastor.

He's driving to the funeral and the shadow of a truck passed over them. And he had a thought.

Honey, would you rather be run over by the truck or by its shadow?

His daughter replied, by the shadow, of course, Dad. That can't hurt us at all. Barnhouse replied, right. If the truck doesn't hit you but only its shadow, you're fine.

Well, it was only the shadow that passed over your mother. She's actually alive. More alive than ever. And that's because 2,000 years ago, the real truck hit Jesus.

That's because death crushed Jesus. And we believe in him. Now the only thing that can cover us is the shadow. And the shadow is only the entrance to glory.

[29 : 34] Jesus raises Lazarus to announce to the world what he plans to do for all who follow him. Jesus is not indifferent to our sorrow. Jesus is not just sorrowful.

And Jesus is not just angry. He comes to conquer sin and death for all those who trust in him. And Jesus is the true Moses who commands the one who holds the power of death.

Let my people go. And he delivers them not merely through the Red Sea but through the waters of death itself. He is the true David who slays the giant whose shadow is long and the fear of whom terrorizes the people of God.

He's the better prophet who sees the dead, dry bones around him and says, Live! Live! He is the true king who comes to deliver his people from the fear of death and every earthly enemy to a kingdom that cannot be shaken, where every sorrow will be swallowed with joy and every tear will be wiped away and guilt and shame and all the how could you.

And you never and you always will be chased away forever. Jesus is the one who announces that God will not abandon his people to Sheol, that indeed every sad thing is becoming untrue because Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

[30 : 50] In Adam all die, but in Christ all who trust in him will be made alive and all things will be made new.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. In God's mercy, I was able to visit each of my four grandparents before they died.

However, I'll never forget my last conversation with my papa. Papa worked hard and overcame many obstacles in his life.

He is a child of an alcoholic. He took up a lot of responsibility early. He was the oldest son and he paved the way for his younger siblings. He quit college to go to the war and was never able to return.

He worked long, hard hours for the rest of his life, but papa was a hard man. He rarely expressed love.

[31 : 56] He quickly expressed his opinion. May run in the family. He was very stubborn. And in his final years, we disagreed on some very important things.

Face to face, man to man. All that made my last encounter with him most significant and most memorable. In the spring of 2008, papa was dying of cancer.

Kim and I made several trips down to see him. And on one particular trip after greeting my grandmother, I entered his room alone. It was difficult to look at him.

Cancer had racked his body, reducing his large frame to a mere 160 pounds. Pain was eased with the slow drip of morphine, but he was out of it.

He mostly slept or laid there in silence. After a few minutes, the nurse said she needed help adjusting him in bed.

[32 : 57] And with her help, I climbed onto his bed and leaned over his frail body and lifted him up to pull him up. I'll never forget looking into his hollow, failing eyes.

He was dying. I sat there in silence. After a while, I asked if I could read the Bible to him. I don't think he responded. But I thought he'd be okay with it.

I read John 11. I read this story. I recited him these amazing words. I am the resurrection life. Whoever believes in me shall never die. I declared to him the truth. Papa, you trusted in Jesus Christ. You will not taste death, Papa.

The shadow, only the shadow will come for you. He said to me, I know that story. I believe.

[34 : 02] Those were his very last words to me. I know that story. I believe. I believe. The only question is, do you?

Do you believe? Do you believe? Jesus Christ didn't come into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him Jesus is a resurrection and this and the life and and so I ask you do you believe I'm not I'm not asking if you were baptized I'm not asking if you go to church I'm asking do you believe I mean is church a one-hour commitment that looks very different from the rest of your life if so I don't think you believe if if Jesus is just someone you can tuck into the corner of your life that won't affect your time or your money or your words or your relationship then it's likely that you don't believe and I want to call on you this Easter morning to believe in Jesus Christ as the only answer and the only mediator between God and man I want to call on you because you are like me you are bound in sin you have no ability to free yourself from sin and you need a mediator before God or you will experience God's full furious wrath for sin in Adam where you and I were born and where we walked we die but in Christ and only in him will be we be made alive so when I say do you believe I'm asking would you put your faith in Jesus Christ that as he hung there on the cross he didn't die for his sins but he experienced the furious wrath for your sin and my sin so that we might be set free and given new life for eternity so do you believe the offer of the gospel is for you this morning if you don't I don't know where you are on the other side of this little screen I don't know if you're still watching through the technical difficulties but I pray that you would give consideration to this your head would not hit the pillow tonight without due consideration of your eternity of your offense to this God and your need for a mediator there is one mediator between God and man your good deeds are not gonna be enough it's not enough for me either you need Jesus Christ you need another advocate let us bow to him father in heaven we do humble ourselves before you and we thank you for just the privilege of considering these truths this morning lord I pray for anyone in any home in our little city that wonders about their relationship with Jesus Christ thank you lord that you didn't come so that you can tell us to to be good one hour of the week or make sure we do the right things every day but you come to make us new to set us free

father I pray that for anybody that doesn't have a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and a true relationship with him that you would open their eyes and their heart this morning lord for all of us we pray that you would indeed as Taylor prayed you would fill us with the joy that rises above our circumstances whatever they might be a joy that's out of the reach of our enemies because Christ is risen and one day we will be too we thank you in Jesus name amen amen the following message is given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com