

The Biggest Verse in the Bible

John 11

As a kid, my mother wanted my sister and me to memorize one verse every day. We had to do our memory verse before we did anything else. She kept a chart on the back of the door. We could pick any verse we wanted, so I scoured the Bible for the shortest verses. *How many of you know what the shortest verse in the Bible is?* How many of you know what the longest verse in the Bible is? Est. 8:9

At once the royal secretaries were summoned-on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai's orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language.

The shortest verse is John 11:35. It comes in the middle of the story of the raising of Lazarus. It is just two simple, short words. Now depending on your translation you could use the classic, though outdated, King James version which says, "Jesus wept." Or, you could take the most widely used translation in America today, the NIV, which renders the complex Greek of this verse as "Jesus wept." Or you may prefer the very modern rendering of the New Living Translation which phrases this way, "Jesus wept."

For many years John 11:35 remained a Biblical curiosity. Then one day, as a young minister faced with doing one of his first funerals, I rediscovered this verse. I came to John 11, because I knew this is the chapter where Jesus lost his close friend Lazarus, comforted the sisters Mary and Martha, and then raised Lazarus from the dead. I was sure I could write a funeral message from this passage. It was in this light that I once again came across those two, simple, short words of John 11:35, "*Jesus wept.*"

All of the sudden these words were no longer just a piece of Bible trivia. But they communicated to me and to a grieving family amazing truth about our Lord and Savior. This may be the shortest verse in the Bible, but it might also be the biggest verse in the Bible. It's short in that it contains only two words. It's big in that it shows us, in one beautiful glimpse, a picture of the fullness of the heart of our Savior. It shows us the immensity of his love for us. It shows us just how he feels about us, and how he identifies with us. It tells us what our suffering does to him, and it opens the way for him to show just how far he is willing to go to take that suffering away. I think most powerfully, though, it is a picture of a God who cries with us.

That's what's here in these two words. That's pretty big. In his first miracle, we saw Jesus in the midst of our celebration, joining in and contributing to the rejoicing and merriment of a wedding feast. Now here in this miracle, the last that John records, we find Jesus in the midst of our suffering, sharing in our loss and pain. From Life's greatest triumphs to its deepest tragedies, our Savior is there with us.

Just two simple, short words, yet they are so big. They are so big in all that they contain. They are so big in all that they show us about Jesus.

I. We See How Big His Love is to Care for Us.

First of all, in these two words we see how big His Love is to care for us. As Jesus comes into the hometown of his dear friends he first sees the grief and sadness of Martha, then he sees the heart-rending anguish of her sister, Mary. Then he sees their friends and neighbors in mourning, and so he is moved to tears. Jesus is filled with compassion

Paraphrasing the words of commentator Bruce Milne– These are not the manufactured tears of the hired professional mourners. These are not the

tears of the inwardly detached observer. Jesus is one with us in our need; he feels our pain; he lives our experience from the inside; his tears at the moment authentically expressed the emotion of his heart.

We should not imagine a mere tear or two streaking down the Savior's cheek. The grammar present in the original Greek here clearly indicates that Jesus burst into tears. This was an open and public display of sorrow and grief.

All of the friends and neighbors who were there mourning could see how genuine and authentic his heartache was. In verse 36 they see Jesus weeping and they say, "See how he loved him!"

He was with them in the midst of their grief, and he is with us too. He with me and he is with you. When the teenage girl is crying in the bushes behind her school, because her heart's been broken by the boy who swore he loved her. Jesus is crying in those bushes too. For the widow who's crying herself to sleep still three years after he's gone. His tears are there too on that pillow.

The parent who cries while pacing the living room floor over a child that seems to twist every hope and fear you have. Your Savior is there too, pacing with you. For the man who's trying to fight back every tear as he cleans out his desk at the company where he's worked for twenty years, but every stapler, every memo pad, every folder brings some thought, some memory, some story and it's all too much to hold back, Jesus is there too. All choked up with you.

God is not cold and distant out there somewhere. He is not far removed and detached from our experience. He is not separate and unapproachable. He is not uncaring and unmoved by what hurts us. Rather a weeping Jesus reminds us that God is right here with us in the muck and mire of our lives. He's right there by our side as we walk through the valley of the shadow. Our

God has wrapped himself in our experience. He feels what we feel. He hurts when we hurt. His tears mingle with our own.

Jesus has truly been made like us in every way. He has experienced all things just as we have. But there is far more to the story. There is nothing unique about crying at a funeral? It's not unusual to cry when you've lost a close friend. Many people would cry in this kind of situation. All this proves is that Jesus identifies with our human experience. So Jesus sympathizes with us. So how does that help us?

Let us back up to the earlier verses of the chapter. John 11:1-5

Now a man named Lazarus was sick He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick"

When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

Then down in verse 11 we read, John 11:11-15

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up."

His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."

What do we learn here? Jesus knew all along that Lazarus was going to die. Before anyone else knew, before Martha, before Mary, before any of their friends or neighbors knew, Jesus knew Lazarus was going to die. But Jesus also knew he had a plan. Lazarus was going to die for a very special purpose. Jesus was going to raise him from the dead, and show his divine glory through him. When Jesus shows up in Bethany he already knew that he is going to go to Lazarus' tomb and bring him back from the grave.

Jesus wasn't weeping because he was overwhelmed by the news. He wasn't shocked by the sudden loss. He wasn't regretting that he didn't get there in time. In fact, knowing that Jesus was planning on bringing Lazarus back to life, I have to ask, "Why was he crying?" I mean, if I had lost a close friend, and I saw his friends and family all crying and grieving, I had the power to bring him back, my response would not be to cry. I would say, "Don't cry. Don't be sad. It's okay. Just wait and see what's going to happen. In fact, call the caterer's because we're going to have a big party tonight." But I wouldn't cry.

Though Jesus understands this big picture, he also sees the pain of the moment. His friends are hurting and he hurts too. He is truly in the midst of their experience, and he is in the midst of our experience. And we see here in these two simple words how big his love is to care for us.

II. We See How Big His Hatred is of What Sin Does to Us.

Jesus is in the midst of our experience, but He's not limited by our experience. Whatever we're going through, he's there too, but unlike us, he is not limited by whatever we're going through. Our God identifies with us in our human experience, but then he takes us beyond it. He does this because the human experience is not what God created it to be. His purpose in Creation has been warped by sin. Sin has perverted and polluted the human experience that God intended. And so we also see in this passage how big his hatred is of what sin does to us.

Jesus' tears are not just about grief and sadness and sorrow. Jesus is angered by what sin does to us. Rom. 3:23 tells us, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*" and Rom. 6:23 tells us, "*the wages of sin is death.*" Ultimately, it is the presence of sin in this world and in our lives that put

Lazarus in the grave. It is sin that has hurt Jesus' friends. It is sin that made it necessary for Jesus to come into the world and wrap himself in our experience. It is sin that will put Jesus on the cross to pay the penalty for our guilt.

There is more than just sorrow and sadness and grief at play here. There is another emotion at work. We read about it in John verses 33-34.

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

The text says Jesus was *deeply moved in spirit and troubled*. This translation is a rather clumsy effort to relate in English a figure of speech that would sound very strange to us. Literally, the phrase here means "to snort like a horse." But what would we think if we read this verse and it said, "*When Jesus saw Mary weeping and the Jews with her also weeping he snorted like a horse.*"

This was a 1st Century figure of speech that meant to be ticked off. My Greek dictionary defines it this way, "*to roar, storm with anger... to be enraged, indignant, to express indignation against someone.*" So to say that Jesus was "deeply moved in spirit" is quite the understatement. In addition to the loving compassion Jesus feels for his friends, he is also mad. He's ticked off. Some think he is mad at Mary or her friends for having so little faith, for not believing that Jesus can raise Lazarus. It's just my opinion, but I don't think so. I certainly don't sense that tone in his words with Martha or Mary. I hear only caring and compassion in those words. I think he is simply mad at what sin and its consequences do to us. It angers him to see what sin has done to those he loves so much.

He hates what sin has done to your life. He hates what it has done to

you. He hates what it has taken from you. He hates how it has derailed his plan for your life. It angers him. It ticks him off. That's what drove him to the cross. We like to say that Jesus died on the cross because he loved us. And that's true. But there's a flipside to that coin. Because he loves us, he hates everything that sin has done to us.

III. We See How Big His Power Is to Deliver Us

Thirdly, we see how big Jesus power is to deliver us. Jesus performed many miraculous signs and wonders. John tells us in John 20:30, but John chose to record seven specific signs. Each one reveals something new and deeper about Jesus. These miracles show us something about his person, about his purpose, and about his power.

The raising of Lazarus is the ultimate display of divine glory in Jesus. Each miracle that Jesus did displayed his power over something. They demonstrated his power over nature when he would calm the storm, walk on the water, or multiply the loaves and fish. They confirmed his power over disease as he gave sight to the blind, or healed a leper. They verified his authority over the spirit world when he would deliver someone from demonic control. But nothing revealed his person, his purpose and his power like showing he had authority over the grave. Even death itself is no match for Jesus. No greater display of his divine glory could Jesus give except for the all-surpassing sign of his own death and resurrection.

John 11:38-44

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days."

40 Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see

the glory of God?"

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me. 43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

It is no coincidence that Jesus performs this miracle four days after Lazarus died. The Jews believed that when a person died that person's spirit stayed with the body for three days. After three days though, the body began to decompose, and when the spirit saw what they called the "change in color" the spirit would then leave.

Do you wonder if God really loves you? Does Jesus really care about you and what happens in your life? I say, "Yes! Absolutely." And I offer the tears of Jesus as irrefutable evidence of his care and compassion. Because Jesus wept you can know that Jesus cares for you.

How deeply has death touched your life? How many loved ones have you had to say goodbye too? How many funerals; how many visitations; how many memorial services have you attended. How many times have you wept because of what death has done. Know this: Jesus wept too. No one hates what death does to us more than our Savior.

But it doesn't stop there. Jesus wasn't just mad at death. He decided he wasn't going to take it anymore, and he did something about it. The resurrection of Lazarus proves Jesus has the power to defeat death. Jesus proved to have the ultimate power over death when he rose from the grave himself. Though we still face death today. Death is a defeated enemy.

It's one thing to face long lines of an entrenched enemy dug in behind artillery and machine gun nests all aimed at you. It's another thing to face long lines of a defeated enemy, disarmed, marching with hands clasped behind their head in surrender.