

Since we all cry, it is easy to identify with this story. Tears drip from every page.

[1-16] Jesus' disciples wept because he planned to return into Judaea where crowds adored him, but religious power-brokers hated him. How else would such people consider the man who drove concession holders out of the Temple?

[17-32] Sisters wept over death of their brother Lazarus and Jesus' apparent disregard of their cry for help. Why didn't he come?

[33-46] Jesus wept over sin's destructive effect. Untreated, it enslaves and ultimately kills those made in the Father's image.

There is much to learn from John's record of the people Jesus met. A family's reputation saved when he turned water into wine at a wedding in Cana [Ch 2]. A religious professor was told to go back to kindergarten before he could follow Jesus. "You must be born again [have a spiritual beginning]" [Ch 3]. A lonely woman unsatisfied by many de facto relationships was offered "living water" to ensure that she would never thirst [like that] again" [Ch 4]. After 38 years waiting to dip in a magic pool a man was told to take up his bed and walk; only to find himself charged with carrying his bed on Saturday! The 'lone adulteress' was "caught in the act" and paraded before Jesus by religious zealots whose hypocrisy was confirmed by their inability to cast "the first stone". They melted away and the woman was told to sin no more.

Earth's misery and heaven's glory intersected in these events

Now, Jesus the 'Life-giver' meets death head-on and overcomes it. Faith faces its greatest challenge. Believe now or never!

1 WHAT MADE THE DISCIPLES CRY? [11:1 - 16]

[i] The Call for help came from Martha and Mary [v2], great friends of proven loyalty [v5] saying that Lazarus was sick [v3]

[ii] Consideration of Jesus' purpose was illustrated by the degree of difference between 'sleep' and 'death' [v4]; one which gets us from day to day and the other which takes us from time into eternity. It is Lazarus' death that will display God's glory. Jesus waited two days before moving [v6]. This is why we should not fear when prayer seems to be unanswered immediately.

[iii] The disciples' Cry of concern --- Why go to Judaea? [v7-8]. That's where people tried to stone Jesus. The Disciples argued that since 'sleep' leads to recovery there was no need to go [v11-12]

[iv] The challenge to Challenge to commitment is clarified by truth

The upright need not fear forces of darkness; even powerful religious ones. Don't let them run or ruin your faith [v9-10].

Lazarus had died [v14] He is out of their reach because he sleeps the sleep of death.

Delay would lead to belief in Jesus' power to reach him. "Let us go to him [not Bethany or the friends]" [v15]

Thomas indicated their willingness and ignorance when he said, "Let us also go that we may die with him" [v16]. There is loyalty to Jesus but inability to believe in his power to save, even from death. Thomas' inability continued beyond the Resurrection of both Lazarus and Jesus, until he was confronted with the Risen Lord. [20:24-25].

Fear and lack of faith made the disciples cry.

2 WHAT MADE THE SISTERS CRY? [11:17-32]

Lazarus had been dead four days; hopelessly out of reach [v17]. There had been no explanation for Jesus' delay in coming to them. Confrontation with entombed flesh is no encouragement to look for life. Wallowing in melancholy the sisters were unrealistic and demanding rather than welcoming when Jesus arrived. "If only you had been here our brother would not have died" [v21, 32]. Trust was also evident. "Even now God will give you what you ask" [v22] There's is the cry of the desperate who will try anything.

Jesus confirmed orthodox belief in a general resurrection. "Your brother will rise to life again" [23-24]. The sisters adopted the cry of protesters and babies. *We want it now!* Jesus announced, "I am the resurrection and the life believe and live" [v25] The whole episode was to display God's glory, reminding genuine believers that beyond pain and sorrow divine love was weaving a safety net through which they could never fall. It is hard to feel secure when facing the crisis, but joy comes with the realisation of the truth.

3 WHAT MADE JESUS CRY? [11:33-46]

[i] "Jesus wept" [v35] A *succinct* but not insignificant statement. He knows and feels our need, but the meaning is deeper than that. Jesus groaned deep within and became troubled [v33, 37]. he grieved for his friends in their sorrow as well as for his own of his friend Lazarus.

But he wept with anger because of sin's dominance over creation's rulers!

People are meant to walk tall in the world enjoying fellowship with the God who made them. They are not meant to be addicted to alcohol, pornography, meaningless leisure activities, greed and carelessness. They were certainly not given life in order to have it snuffed out by death.

[ii] Onlookers wondered at Jesus' love for Lazarus [v36] evidenced by his tears, but they questioned his ability to do anything for him. "Why could he not save Lazarus?" [v37]. *Reaching out to the dead* is beyond their experience. Despite the cynicism of this age it has to be said that transplants and cloning cannot compare with resurrection for effectiveness.

[iii] Jesus wrestled with his followers' partial belief. When he commanded the tomb to be opened [v39], Martha protested, because her brother had been dead four days. The command to open the tomb was a call to expect God's glory to be displayed [v40]. Faith looks for life where only sickness and death pollute the air.

[iv] Jesus wrested power from the evil one He prayed confidently to the Father, "Thank you for hearing me" [v41-42] and expressing his own trust in the Father. "I only pray so they will believe". In a reflection of creation he spoke confidently to Lazarus. "Come out" [v43] challenging onlookers to be involved. "Loose him Let him go" [v44]. This was a 'hands on' learning experience for those who wanted to be truly his disciples.

[v] The crowd responded John says, "Many believed". Others clung to formal religion [v45-46].

Four principles to grasp....

- # Weep over sin which tears us away [in rebellion and death] from our loving Father's arms.
- # Weep for loved ones and strangers who refuse to be born again to live forever.
- # Spread the good news of life available through faith in Jesus Christ.
- # Become a lifesaver today. The first life to save is your own.

Believe in the risen Jesus with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.