

# Why Jesus Wept

**John 11:1; 4-7; 28-39; 43-50**  
**Preached by Dr. Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
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To enlightened ears, John's report of Lazarus being raised from the dead is problematic. It's one of those unbelievable stories mocking the scientific method and the natural law. But make no mistake about it, Lazarus was clinically dead. This was no near-death experience with the patient's vital signs momentarily cease to be before being resuscitated. By the time Jesus arrived on the scene, Lazarus was dead four days with his body already rotting in the tomb.

We must be in agreement on this point before proceeding any further. Otherwise we'll try to come up with logical explanations for Lazarus's raising to make this story sound plausible. But this story isn't supposed to sound plausible. It's all about the impossible becoming possible.

Speaking personally, I have no problem believing Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead since the mystery of the incarnation holds this story together. If you believe John's declaration in the opening verses of his gospel, "...the Word became flesh to live among us filled with grace and truth," how could you doubt the possibility of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead?

Before this story can speak to us, we must also agree on Jesus' motivation for raising Lazarus from the dead. It may seem Jesus restored Lazarus back to life because he felt guilty for waiting too long after getting word that Lazarus was dying. Instead of rushing to Lazarus's bedside to restore his health, Jesus fiddle and faddled before slowly making his way to his friend's house in faraway Bethany. When Jesus finally got there, he had to face Mary and Martha who both chided Jesus for not dropping everything and run as quickly as possible to save their brother's life.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to think Jesus restored his friend's life out of guilt or any other personal reason.

Then why did Jesus do it? Lazarus and his sisters lived in the village of Bethany, a stone's throw from Jerusalem. Jesus knew the moment the tombs large round stone rolled away at his command and Lazarus stepped out of the tomb, the news would immediately reach the ears of the members of the religious establishment.

Straight away the temple priests, the scribes and Pharisees would be furious but also worried. If Jesus continued performing his signs and wonders, the people would make Jesus their king. Then the inevitable would happen. The Roman army would march into Jerusalem, destroy the temple and finally do the unthinkable, uproot the Jews from the Promised Land and scatter them to the four corners of the earth.

Anticipating their worst fears, Jesus counted on the Sadducees, the scribes and Pharisees to enter damage control mode after giving them the excuse they needed to be rid of him, once and for all.

So from the moment he received word Lazarus was near death, Jesus began orchestrating events to start the predictable chain reaction that would end in his crucifixion.

That's why Jesus wept. The explanation for his sobbing is confirmed later on in John's Gospel when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. Unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke, John doesn't report Jesus having second thoughts about being crucified or his prayer, "Father, take this cup of suffering away from me." According to John, Jesus' intense Gethsemane moment took place days earlier in front of Lazarus's tomb.

By commanding, "Lazarus, come out," Jesus effectively signed his own death warrant. That's why Jesus wept. He wasn't weeping for Mary and Martha. He was weeping for himself. Lazarus stepping out of his tomb would lead to Jesus' first step to the cross.

As you can see, the implications of this story go far beyond questioning whether or not it really happened. This story is really about Jesus risking everything in obedience to his father's will. He intentionally made the decision to set the stage for his crucifixion by luring the religious authorities into justifying their handing Jesus over to the Romans.

Caiaphas, the high priest that year, bluntly articulated that justification after hearing members of the Council fussing over what to do next to stop Jesus and avert disaster.

He declared, "You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed."

As far as Caiaphas was concerned, Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead was the tipping point. Jesus must die for the good of the nation. Ironically, Caiaphas's argument for Israel's preservation neatly conformed to God's plan for our salvation. None of them could ever imagine their decision to make Jesus a scapegoat paved the way for Jesus to become the Lamb of God.

This story is a reaffirmation of the sovereignty of God. We may try to manipulate people and events to our own advantage but in the end, God wins. Knowing this should motivate all of us to be in sync with God's will, even when it's not in our best interest because ultimately God's will is always in our best interest.

From the beginning of the Old Testament until the end of the New, we find stories of God's people panicking before taking matters into their own hands during times of crisis.

Since she was barren, Sarah convinced Abraham to take Hagar as a concubine to fulfill God's promise of a son. Moses' brother Aaron gave into pressure and allowed the Israelites to fashion and the Golden Calf as a peace offering to the Egyptians. King Saul consulted the witches of Endor when the prophet Samuel delayed his coming before a great battle. Peter and

the other disciples tried to keep Jesus from going to Jerusalem when he told he them he would be put to death.

All of us can remember when we tried to circumvent God's will because we thought we knew best. But no matter how hard we try having our own way, God enfolds our disobedience into his will for our good.

It's easy for us to fault the religious establishment for their deification of the status quo and refusing to consider God's way is the best way. They were blinded by their fears. All that mattered was their self preservation. They couldn't or wouldn't see and submit to God's plan to usher into the world something new and wonderful, what they waited for for centuries, the coming of God's kingdom and God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

Sadly, we do the same when it suits us. We rather have things stay the same even when the old ways are no longer effective. We love our time honored traditions and rituals even more than we love God. So we dig in our heels and protect what we have not realizing we may be opposing God.

The story of Lazarus being raised from the dead ended in the crucifixion. Or did it? Before he commanded Lazarus to "come out," Jesus said to Mary, "I am the resurrection and the life. If you believe in me though you were dead yet show you live. If you believe in me you will not perish but have eternal life. Do you believe this?"

Don't confuse Lazarus's restoration to life with the resurrection to eternal life Jesus experienced on Easter morning. Unlike Jesus, Lazarus didn't step out of his tomb in glory. Lazarus couldn't appear out of nowhere and just as quickly disappear from sight, like Jesus did in the Upper Room and later on the road to Emmaus. We can also assume some time later Lazarus died, like all of us will die, of natural causes.

The resurrection of Christ was something entirely different. When God raised Jesus from the dead it was the beginning of the new creation promised to the patriarchs and prophets ages before. And God's new creation didn't come cheap. The totality of God suffered through Christ's passion. That's why Jesus wept. No one could ever begin to imagine the depths of this suffering and thankfully, none of us ever will.

We ask ourselves, why didn't God choose another way, a less painful way to restore his creation and everyone in it? That's one of the sorrowful mysteries known but to God alone.

Around the Lord's Table we are asked to remember Jesus. On this fifth Sunday in Lent we should especially remember why Jesus wept. He alone could pay the terrible price to restore the creation back to God. For that we owe him everything.

For that reason alone, take time this morning to thank Jesus. Bless his holy name by taking time recommit yourself as one of God's beloved children and one of Jesus' faithful disciples. Do this to remember him.