

## THE SMALLEST VERSE

### John 11:35

#### INTRODUCTION:

John 11:35 is only 2 words in length. That makes it the shortest verse in the Bible.

In church camp, VBS and youth groups, when we got points for every verse we memorized, many of us thought we were being clever to recite “Jesus wept.” We’d laugh when we said it like we had pulled something over on the adults. In fact, we almost treated this little verse as if *it* were a joke. But friends, I want you to know that the tears of Jesus are no laughing matter.

This little verse was written in the context of Jesus’ grief over the death of his good friend, Lazarus. John 11 begins like this:

<sup>1</sup> *Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”*

<sup>4</sup> *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.” <sup>5</sup> Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.*

<sup>7</sup> *Then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”*

<sup>8</sup> *“But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?”*

<sup>9</sup> *Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble, for he sees by this world’s light. <sup>10</sup> It is when he walks by night that he stumbles, for he has no light.”*

<sup>11</sup> *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.”*

<sup>12</sup> *His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” <sup>13</sup> Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.*

<sup>14</sup> *So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, <sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”*

Like all of us, Jesus had a circle of particularly close friends. Peter, James and John were particularly close among the apostles. But outside of the company of the apostles, Jesus also had some very close friends: a brother and two sisters from the small town of Bethany, Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

One day, Jesus got word that his good friend, Lazarus, was sick. Jesus told his apostles that this sickness would not end in death and they spent two more days in Perea, where they were, before they started on the two-day journey to Bethany.

When Jesus told the apostles that Lazarus' illness would not end in death, they undoubtedly assumed that he meant that Lazarus would not die. But he did die. Was Jesus mistaken? Had death out-foxed him this time? Or might there have been more to his statement than the apostles first thought? Jesus had more to say on the subject than he had said that day in Perea.

You see, Lazarus died but that was not the end. The good news is that his sickness did not end in death.

Now, Jesus knew the good news. He was the only one in Bethany that day who really did know the good news. But he still wept in spite of the fact that he knew the good news.

Before we can appreciate why Jesus wept, we have to take a good close look at the good news as Jesus knew it, particularly in relation to his close friend, Lazarus. The good news was (and is):

## **I. DISEASE NEED NOT END IN DEATH**

I have no way of knowing the illness that Lazarus suffered. The Bible doesn't say. Perhaps that's a good thing. Not knowing the specifics of his sickness may make it a little easier to personalize this truth: disease need not end in death. Whatever your illness or infirmity, your physical condition, no matter what it is, need not end in death. Even if a doctor has told you that you are terminal, this sickness need not end in death.

I have sat at the bedside of way too many dying people. I've been at deathbeds in homes and hospitals, in ERs and waiting rooms of ORs. I've kept vigil with friends and families and, sometimes, I've kept the vigil alone. I am familiar with illness and injury, with disease and disability, with deterioration and with death. I've watched the readout at the bedside and I've seen the numbers go to "00". I've stared as the line on the monitor went flat. I've listened as the beeps ceased. And I've heard as a doctor or nurse gently said, "It's over now."

But I am here to tell you it wasn't. I want you to know, that was not the end. You need to know, you must know, that this disease did not end in death. It never does.

Job asked, "If a man die, will he live again?" On the occasion of the death of Lazarus, Jesus answered Job's question in the affirmative. And this morning, I want to answer that question in the affirmative, too.

For those who have placed their faith in Jesus, no illness will end in death. No injury will end in death. No accident or incident will end in death because the grave is a door not a wall. That door opens to an eternity with our Father in heaven and with those loved ones who, having placed their trust in Jesus Christ, have gone there before us. Disease need not end in death. Not only that, sin need not end in death.

## **II. SIN NEED NOT END IN DEATH**

Romans 6 tells us that the wages of sin is death. If anyone sins, he must die. That is the price of sin. Romans also tells us that we have all sinned. That means we are all under the same death sentence because of our sin.

But the same scripture which tells us that the wages of sin is death, goes on to tell us that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

For anyone who has placed his faith in Jesus Christ, sin is forgiven, forgotten by God and we are "justified". As someone has noted, "justified" means, just-as-if-I'd never sinned.

The Bible says that, "it is appointed unto man once to die and after that comes the judgment." So physical death is inevitable unless the Lord returns before we pass away.

But that is not the end. For the Christian there is the assurance of life after death.

And just as importantly, there is life after sin. Regardless of the sins you have sinned and the guilt you have carried, you need not live under the penalty of your sin and you need not live under the burden of your shame. For those who are in Christ, sins are forgiven. Romans 8:1 says, "*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*" Because God has forgiven you, you are free to forgive yourself and live the life of an innocent person. Sin need not end in death.

## **III. RELATIONSHIPS NEED NOT END IN DEATH**

Grieving relatives: mothers of newborns, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters had their hearts broken anew in Alsip, IL this week. Don't try to tell them that relationships end at death. The scattered bones of loved ones are

immune from pain, but those who remain are not. We don't want their rest or their memory disturbed.

When the news broke about the pillaged graves at Burr Oak cemetery, many of us probably imagined how we would have felt if the grave of one of our dear ones had been savaged. As believers, we have all anticipated the joy with which we will see their graves burst open at Christ's returning. But for those graves to be violated in this way by greedy thieves: that is something none of us would have anticipated.

This incident forcefully reminds us that relationships do not end at death. A father who has buried a son or a daughter is still a father. A child who has buried a parent is still the offspring of that one. Any who have lost a beloved grandparent knows that, at a very deep level, the relationship continues.

They live on in all those reminders that we cherish and treasure. It was J.B.F. Wright who penned the words:

*Precious memories, how they linger,  
How they ever flood my soul.  
In the stillness of the midnight  
Precious sacred scenes unfold.*

But beyond the fact that our recollections of loved ones will keep their memories alive for us, for the Christian there is also the anticipation that we will see those believers again in heaven. In John 14:1-4, Jesus said:

*<sup>1</sup> "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. <sup>2</sup> In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. <sup>3</sup> And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. <sup>4</sup> You know the way to the place where I am going."*

Don't let your hearts be troubled. Don't get anxious about the future. Jesus said that there is lots of room in His Father's house and if that were not true, he would have told us. There is plenty of room for everyone who has accepted Jesus as his savior and one day we will be reunited with them. So don't worry about getting attached to people. Our relationships with them need not end in death. They can continue for eternity.

#### **IV. A CHRISTIAN'S INFLUENCE NEED NOT END IN DEATH**

Who are the people who've had the most impact on you and your walk with Jesus? Have any of them passed from this life? If so, I am sure that you would agree that their influence did not end in death. They have remained important and influential in your life even after death.

Now translate that to your witness. Think of the fact that your testimony can reverberate long after your voice has been stilled. Your witness can be seen

long after your body cannot. The impact of your life can be felt long after you have left this life.

For the Christian, his influence need not end in death. Christians can leave a lasting legacy, an enduring example and an ongoing inspiration that will last for generations to come.

Think of that, loving parent. Think of that, concerned grandma and grandpa. You are sowing seeds that will bear fruit long after you are gone. You are planting oaks, not grass. Maintain your faithful witness. Persist in your loyal service. Keep on loving. Keep on praying. Keep on believing in the Lord and trust that your influence will endure beyond your last breath.

For the Christian, his disease need not end in death, his sin need not end in death, his relationships need not end in death and his influence need not end in death. That's the good news and we need to fully understand the good news before we can fully appreciate why Jesus wept even though he knew all of the good news about the good news.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

A few years ago, a book by Philip Yancey challenged one of my old assumptions.

Back when I first began to recite John 11:35, I didn't give much thought to why Jesus wept. It was enough to know that he did. But as I got older, I began to wonder why.

Some have speculated that Jesus wept because of the grief of the two women (he was sympathetic for the sisters). But I doubt that is the case because he knew that their tears would soon turn to laughter. If that were Jesus' focus, I suspect he might have had a difficult time stifling a grin because he knew that in a few minutes, he was going to give them back their brother – ALIVE!

Many have speculated that Jesus was missing his old friend. But that doesn't make sense because Jesus knew that very soon he was going to raise Lazarus from his grave.

Some have theorized that Jesus wept because of sorrow over the consequence of Adam's sin that resulted in death: he was sympathetic for mankind. And while that makes a certain amount of sense, it overlooks the fact that Jesus was just about to give death a sound spanking. I doubt he would have wept at that prospect.

Still others have proposed other reasons why Jesus wept. But Philip Yancey may have it right. He suggests that Jesus may have been weeping for Lazarus. Lazarus had experienced life beyond the grave; he'd begun to experience the light where there is no night, the life where there is no death, the joy where there

is no sorrow. But Jesus knew that, as a final sign to his disciples (“so that you might believe,” he had said) he was going to have to call Lazarus to come back.

It was as if Jesus were thinking, “Sorry, my friend, but I’m going to have to bring you back here for a while. Sorry, my friend. You’ve experienced the ultimate healing; you’ve enjoyed some rest; you’ve renewed some relationships; you’ve received some reward. But for the sake of those who are still here, I’ve got to bring you back for a bit. Sorry, my friend, but ‘Lazarus, come out!’”

This was a fresh perspective for me. I think it may be true. Perhaps he was weeping for Lazarus who had begun to enjoy the pleasures of paradise but who was now going to be brought back for a time so the world would know that Jesus Christ is Lord. If that be true, then Jesus’ wept so we could rejoice. So we could rejoice and crown him the Lord of life!

**INVITATION:**       # 45 – *“Crown Him With Many Crowns”*