

JESUS UNDERSTANDS THE LOSS OF LOVED ONES

Last week we were reminded from Hebrews 4:15 that our high priest—Jesus Himself—is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities...” That means the **heart of Jesus** is affected by our grief...our struggles...our sins...our weaknesses. And because Jesus has a **heart** of grace, He wants us to come boldly to the **throne** of grace.

Jesus doesn't just feel **for** us, however. He feels **with** us—He **sympathizes** with us—because He “**was in all points tempted [tested] like as we are**, yet without sin.” That means whatever **we go through** isn't **unique to us** because Jesus already went through it!

A week ago, we looked at the truth that Jesus can sympathize with us **being misunderstood** because He was misunderstood! While on earth, Jesus was misunderstood by His flesh-and-blood brothers, by His friends, and by “religious” people. We, too, will be misunderstood—even by our own family members—if we choose to **do right** in God's sight.

We also know that like us, Jesus experienced contempt...and hatred...and loneliness...and the “pressures of life” ...and rejection. I believe He also felt like **giving up!** You remember **why** I said that, right? Either Jesus **meant it** when He said, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me...” (Mt 26:39)—or He was **pretending to be in despair!** If He was “pretending” to be going through something He **really wasn't going** through, He would be **a hypocrite**—and thus a sinner! And if He was **a sinner**, He can't be **the Savior!**

But...if we are honest—and if we know some basic facts about the life of Jesus—it is easy to wonder about this question: “How can someone who was **never married**—and never **had a child**—know what it is like to **lose a loved one?**” How can Jesus sympathize **with us** losing a loved one when it never happened to Him?

We're going to tackle that question here this morning.

Here again is the question: “How can someone who was **never married**—and never **had a child**—know what it is like to **lose a loved one?**”

1. Jesus presumably lost his earthly “father”

Not going to spend a lot of time on this one because we don't have a lot of details—and we can't be 100% certain that Joseph **actually did die** before Jesus did! We suspect he did, though, based on John 19. Let's turn there; please follow along as I read verses 25-27.

Here we see Jesus—as Mary's oldest son—turning the responsibility of **His mother's care** over to the apostle John. Does **Joseph's absence** at the cross **imply he was dead?** I believe so—and here's why I say that.

--Joseph was a **God-fearing and obedient man**. We see that in how he obeyed what the angel told him regarding **taking Mary** as his wife...and by **fleeing** with his young family to Egypt when told to do so.

--He also **dedicated Jesus** at the temple when he was 41 **days** old as required by the Mosaic Law—and brought Him to **Jerusalem every year for the feast of the Passover**—prior to age 12—according to Luke 2:41.

Is it possible that Joseph was **alive** when Jesus was being crucified—and was just **too busy** to accompany his wife Mary at the cross? Possible—**but not likely**. Notice what Mary and Joseph were told when Jesus was an infant. **Luke 2:33-35** “And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him. ³⁴ And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, **this child** is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and **for a sign** which shall be spoken against; ³⁵ (Yea, a **sword shall pierce through thy own soul also**,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

From these verses, we see that Mary and Joseph were told by Simeon that “a sword” would one day “pierce” Mary's soul—meaning her **heart would be broken** on account of Jesus. Imagine having that “hanging over your head” your whole life! As time went on, my guess is that Mary was beginning to see that that prophecy was going to be **fulfilled at the cross!** I can't imagine God-fearing Joseph “staying home” because he was too busy to be with Mary during the darkest hour of her life—watching her son die a criminal's death on a

cross! So although we can't be dogmatic, Jesus probably *lost His earthly father*, Joseph. But rather than spend more time discussing what we *don't* know, let's move on to what *we do know*.

2. Jesus personally lost a close friend

Who was that friend? *Lazarus*, of course! We read of that in John 11; let's turn there. Please follow along as I read vs 1-5.

A. Jesus loved Lazarus. How do we know Jesus loved Lazarus?

Because we just read it! In vs 3, the sisters sent a message to Jesus that "he whom thou lovest is sick."

--In vs 5, God through John states that Jesus loved all three of them.

--And in vs 36, the Jews that saw Jesus weep, said "Behold, how He loved him!"

B. Jesus "lost" Lazarus

In vs 4, Jesus says, "This sickness is **not unto death...**," but in vs 14 we read: "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, **Lazarus is dead.**" Was *Jesus confused* as to what was going to happen to Lazarus? Not at all!

F.F. Bruce suggests the meaning of vs 4 is this: "This illness is not so much one that will **terminate in death** as one which will demonstrate the glory of God." (The Gospel and Epistles of John, pg 240).

C. Jesus wept over the loss of Lazarus

Notice now vs 33. "When Jesus therefore saw her [Mary] weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled,"

Jesus was deeply moved by the tears of Mary—and those who were weeping with her. How moved? Verse 35 "Jesus wept." Although the English word "wept" appears in the NT 13 times, the Greek word that it comes from is used only here in the NT. Bruce suggests it may carry the idea of "burst into tears."

Why did Jesus weep? Did Jesus cry just because *others were crying*—like some of us sometimes do during a "tear-jerker" movie? And just *how genuine* could Jesus' tears be when He knew He was *just minutes away* from bringing Lazarus back to life? Let's try to answer some of these questions.

1) First, Jesus' tears were *genuine!* If they were *fake tears*—and Jesus was merely "*putting on a show*"—He would be *a hypocrite*—and a sinner—like I mentioned earlier.

2) Second, we don't need to "spiritualize" the answer as some do. Here's what I mean.

--Some suggest Jesus was weeping because of a *general sorrow* over sin and death.

--Others suggest Jesus was moved because of their *lack of faith*. Look at vs 23-24 (read).

--Still others suggest that Jesus wept because He knew He was going to *bring Lazarus back to life*—and Lazarus would rather keep on enjoying paradise!

Notice the quote I have from a **D. Young**: "In one sense there was no need for these tears. In a few minutes many tears might be shed, but they would be tears of joy over the restored relative. Jesus knew what was going to happen; **why, then**, did He seem as if plunged in the **very depths of sorrow**? The answer is that **He really was in the very depths of sorrow**, in full communion **of grief with the two sisters** who were His friends. Jesus behaved in all respects naturally and tenderly." (Bible Hub)

I think *we forget that* sometimes. I think we sometimes *over emphasize* the deity of Jesus—His "God-ness"—so much so that we *under emphasize* His humanity. Since God commands us to "weep with them that weep" (Rom 12:15), should it surprise us *that Jesus wept* with His dear friends as *they wept* over the loss of their brother? I don't think it should surprise us at all!

D. Lessons learned from Jesus' weeping

So, what are some takeaways from the truth that Jesus wept? Here are three:

1) It's okay to have close friends because Jesus did! It is interesting to me that these 3 were not disciples—they were not co-workers—they were simply friends. That means to me that you don't have to be a "lone ranger"—you don't have to be friendless—to be godly!

2) It is right—it is okay—to share in the sorrow of others because Jesus did. If it was *wrong to cry*, Jesus wouldn't have! We also *don't see Jesus scolding His friends* because they were mourning the loss of their brother. Too often times we try to *hurry people past their grief* because it makes *us feel* uncomfortable.

3) Jesus is tender and compassionate. Does that mean Jesus is weeping now in heaven? I don't think so because it is hard to imagine heaven being a *place of constant joy* if Jesus is always in tears! But that does not take away from the fact that *He knows* what we go through...and *has experienced* what we go through...and is *touched by* what we go through...and is willing to *give grace to help in time* of need.

E. Lessons learned from Lazarus' death

1) God doesn't always answer our prayers in the way we like. The two sisters sent word to Jesus that Lazarus was sick with the belief that Jesus would heal Him. We see Martha saying that very thing in vs 21 "...Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Jesus *didn't come* right away—and *didn't heal him* from afar—because God *wanted Lazarus to die* so Jesus could bring him back to life!

2) God can be glorified in situations that seem tragic. That certainly was the case here. We already noted in vs 4 that the sickness was not for *permanent death*, but so that God the Father—and God the Son—would be *glorified*. In other words, *honor and praise* would be given to Jesus based on Him raising Lazarus back to life.

Our "story"—our storms and situation—don't always end this way, do they? But sometimes they do! Sometimes God "raises up" our loved ones! Some of you might be thinking, 'Wait a minute, Pastor! God doesn't bring people back to life nowadays, does He?' He actually does! Jerry wasn't buried and brought back to life after 4 days, but he was pronounced dead at least once after suffering a cardiac arrest just over a year ago. Was God glorified in that miracle! Jerry and Brenda have shared that testimony with many in the medical field.

But what if *God doesn't heal* our loved one? What if our loved one *has a stroke* and doesn't fully recover? What if our loved one *gets dementia* like Ron Hamilton and suffers for years? Can God *still be glorified* in those situations? Yes, He can—if we *cling* to Him and *trust* in Him and *remain faithful* to Him!

About a month ago, I was *at a Pastor's conference at Camp Chetek* and ran into a pastor from E.C. I asked him about a woman Louise and I have known for 40 plus years who lost her husband a year ago last month. I had heard that she had been diagnosed with a fairly aggressive cancer. When I asked how she was doing, he said something to the effect: "She is a model of faithfulness. We are learning—from her—how a saint of God walks through the valley of the shadow of death with courage and joy."

That is *God's doing*, of course, and He rightly should receive the honor and glory for that! Here's one last take-away for us: **3) The loss of a loved one may only be temporary!**

Isn't that great? The loss of Martha and Mary *was temporary* because Jesus brought Lazarus back to life. And *our loss will be temporary* if both you and your loved one are born-again and heaven-bound! Why *don't we weep* as those who have no hope? Because some day the "dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so *shall we ever be* with the Lord." (I Thess 4:16b-17).

Who will ever be with the Lord? The saved—and their saved loved ones! How can Jesus sympathize with us in the loss of our loved one? First, because He probably lost His earthly father. Second, because He personally lost a good friend.

Third, because... **3. God perplexingly "lost" His Son**

We're switching it up a little here, in that we are not talking about *Jesus losing a loved one*—we are talking about *God the Father* suffering the *death—the loss*—of His Son! Figuratively speaking, we need to take the shoes off our feet because the place we are about to stand is indeed mysterious and holy ground.

To wrap our minds around *the Trinity* is one thing, but to comprehend that the *Son was forsaken* by the Father—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me"—is quite another.

--How can God the Father *separate Himself* from God the Son?

--How can the Father *turn His face away* from the Son—one of His three persons?

I don't know—and neither do you! But we accept it by faith because that is what the Bible says!
This much we do know—Jesus did **not pretend** to be forsaken—**He was forsaken!**

Randy Alcorn in his book "*If God is Good*," put it like this: "For the first time in all eternity, the oneness within the Godhead knew separation. In ways we cannot comprehend—ways that would amount to blasphemy had not God revealed it to us—the Atonement **tore God apart.**" (pg 215).

That's hard to process, isn't it? And yet, that is what happened!

A. How did God forsake His Son. To answer this question, let's turn to II Corinthians 5.

--Vs 21. "For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us..."

--God **poured out the punishment** that we deserved for our sin on Jesus.

--In essence, Jesus suffered **our hell**—the separation from God that we deserve—when He hung on the cross.

And when that happened, the Father—who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab 1:13)—turned Himself away from His Son! Mt 27:45 says there was darkness over all the land from the 6th to the 9th hour—from noon to 3pm.

Does Jesus understand pain and suffering? Yes, He does!

Does God the Father understand loss? Yes, He does!

Do we sometimes wrongly think "God doesn't get it?" when it comes to our pain and suffering? Yes, we do!

John Stott wrote: "I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the cross.... In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?" He then mentions how statues of Buddha appear to be smiling and seem so detached from the agonies of the real world. Stott goes on to say that he turns away from the statues of Buddha, and instead imagines the cross.

"...I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through his hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us." (Quoted by Alcorn in *If God is Good*; 217).

God knows what suffering is all about, doesn't He? Aren't you glad we have a high priest that **went through** all of that—for us? He knows what loss...and pain...and suffering is all about because He experienced it too!

To again quote Alcorn: "Some people can't believe God would create a world in which people would suffer so much. Isn't it more remarkable that God would create a world in which no one would suffer more than He?" (*If God is Good*; 215)

B. Why did God forsake His Son? Because He loves us!

I John 4:10 "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Propitiation means the satisfaction—the sacrifice and payment—for our sins!

God loves us—that is why Jesus came!

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..."

Romans 5:8 "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

C. What is the result of God forsaking His Son?

Look at vs 19. "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself..."

To **reconcile** means to restore a broken relationship. Our relationship with God is broken because of sin. Sin separates us from God—so to have our relationship with God restored, our sin needs to be gotten rid of. But we can't get rid of our sin, can we? We can't get rid of the **guilt of past** sin—and we can't "stem the tide" of current sin. So God does it for us. How?

Look again at vs 19. God does **not impute**—meaning count—our trespasses **against us**. Does He just ignore them...pretend they aren't there...sweep them under the rug?

No! Vs 21 tells us that God **put our sin on Jesus** when He was "made sin for us." That's **not the only thing** God did to restore our relationship with Him, though.

Notice the last part of vs 21: "...that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

God not only counts **our sins** as being on Jesus, He counts Jesus' righteousness—**His perfectness**—as being on us! And that, my friends, is why “He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” (1 John 5:12). Do you have the Son? Do you possess Jesus? Is He yours?

So what would God have us do with what we've heard this morning?

“Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus.” In just a moment, we are going to sing that, but that captures well what God wants us to do.

1. If you doubt His love, turn your eyes upon Jesus on the cross!
2. If you doubt God's hatred for sin, turn your eyes upon Jesus on the cross!
3. If you think you can get to heaven some other way than Jesus, turn your eyes upon Jesus. Don't think you can **reject what Jesus did**—and still get into God's heaven.
4. If you are trapped in something that is overwhelming you, turn your eyes upon Jesus! He has a heart of grace—and wants you to come boldly to the throne of grace.