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i-note: The Sorrow of Jesus

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Isaiah 53:3—4

I WAS going to say our Bible passage comes from Isaiah 53:3—4, written about 700BC, when the prophet says this about the Messiah: Isaiah 53:3 *“He was despised and forsaken of men a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and like one from whom men hide their face, he was despised, and we did not esteem him. 4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed...”*

The Message version puts it like this: *“The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling, a scrubby plant in a parched field. There was nothing attractive about him, nothing to cause us to take a second look. He was looked down on and passed over, a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand. One look at him and people turned away. We looked down on him, thought he was scum. But the fact is, it was our pains he carried—our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us. We thought he brought it on himself, that God was punishing him for his own failures. But it was our sins that did that to him, that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins! He took the punishment, and that made us whole. Through his bruises we get healed.”*

But I always wanted to say “Turn in your Bibles to John 11:35, and read out loud with me: *“Jesus wept.”*”

You’ve been impaired.

Your marriage has been jeopardized.

You’ve been subtly controlled by this.

And the influences of society keep us there:

- The childish motto we carry into adulthood that says “Big boys don’t cry”.
- Our over-emphasis on violence and certain sports.
- Our admiration for “the strong, silent type,” and the number of us who hide behind that.
- The equation that “showing emotion = weakness.”
- Puritan ideas + macho ideals + false Christian ideas add up to this myth that Christians aren’t supposed to feel anything but “Praise the Lord.”
- I tell you, one that messed me up, and maybe you too, if you grew up in church: singing “Away in a Manger”, whose second verse says “The cattle are lowing the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes...” ☺. **NO CRYING HE MAKES! NO CRYING HE MAKES!!!** Every time I felt that way, I felt like I was disconnecting from Jesus.

If Jesus is our life, our pattern, and our Lord, we’ve been fed a lie. We have a distorted image, unbiblical and false, and thus unreachable. Yet, how many Christ followers try to reach control over their emotions, only to feel guilt in the process of striving and failing, despairing, and resenting God.

Because we’re messed up, many of us have been short-circuited in our emotional lives. And that’s where we find ourselves. Do you ever feel like you’re walking around some days with these feelings, and the only thing they seem to do is get in the way? We NEED to reclaim our emotions, to live fully alive and fully human, as God intended. Even when that includes sorrow. I believe God must have known our struggle,

because woven throughout the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the emotions of Jesus. We will look at two accounts laced with the sorrow of Jesus and see what we can learn.

Jesus was literally one of us. He was far more human in his emotional life than many of us are. Listen to me: **Jesus was never afraid to show His emotions.** He was never ashamed to let people see and know how he really felt. May we put away our childish shame in showing our emotions and look at Jesus' feelings of sorrow and grief. Jesus' ministry and mission had begun. He had gathered His disciples, and things were going well. But then bad news hit. Listen to when Jesus heard that John the Baptist, his own cousin whom He loved and admired, had been beheaded, brutally murdered, this is what happened: *"When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick."* Matthew 14:13—14. It's a beautiful pattern we can all follow: **withdrawal for a while, but not too long.** If you grieve too long by yourself you may lose your sense of balance and perspective. If you withdraw too long, it's easy to turn in on yourself. And then, a subtle shift happens: you find you are grieving not over the person you lost, but for yourself.

To withdraw is good, for a time, but most of us know people who have *totally* withdrawn. They've left the church. They've dropped out of relationships because they can't get past their grief. Somewhere along the line, they stopped grieving for the person they lost and started feeling sorry for themselves. They called it grief, though it's really more of a tomb. Because they've hardened themselves, like shellac. Nothing gets in or out. And they've cut themselves off from any life and health available to them. On the other hand, there are some of you here who have suffered tremendous losses, and you *haven't* cut yourselves off. And I commend you. As hard as it has been, you're moving through your grief and you've opened yourself to God for healing and more living, even in the midst of grieving. Withdrawal is good, for a time.

The next thing to do is to get with your closest friends. And to pray; which means spending time with your closest friend, God Himself. [If you struggle with knowing how to do this, please contact us...or bulletin insert].

Jesus took time with His friends, and he also withdrew for hours to pray. But He never forgot the needs of others. He helped them, healed them, fed them. **For Jesus there was great healing therapy coming from work and from doing something for someone else...** not *instead* of sorrow, but in the midst of sorrow.

Now look at our scripture for today: Jesus is at the tomb of Lazarus, who died while Jesus was away. Lazarus may have been Jesus' best friend. Throughout His ministry, Jesus repeatedly stops in Bethany. And this time, Jesus got to Bethany because Lazarus had just died. And John records it: *"Jesus wept"* John 11:35. Thank you, God for this great, little verse. Not just for helping Sunday School kids who need to recite a quick Bible verse; but for the *meaning* of it! No other religion lifts up the embrace of sorrow the way Christianity does.

Jesus wept. Jesus cried. And he wasn't the least bit ashamed to admit his sorrow, and to express it deeply and openly. Calvin Miller writes "Crying is common in this world...All infants do it everywhere—even in public. By adulthood most crying is done alone and in the dark. Weeping, for babies, is a sign of health and evidence that they are alive. Isn't this a chilling omen? Not laughter but tears is the life sign. It leaves "weeping" and "being" synonyms." Calvin Miller, The Valiant Papers, p. 22.

[When was the last time you cried?] Jesus cried. And He must have really let it out; because look at the verses that follow. *"35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance."* John 11:35—38.

And the next thing he did was pray. 39 *"Take away the stone," Jesus said.*

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad stench, 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."

And, He kept reminding the mourners about the resurrection. He had just told Martha "*I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die*" John 11:25.

Listen: Your sorrow is a signal from God to remind you how important life is. There is sorrow because there is love. There is loss. And life is messy. That means sorrow, and grief, and sadness. But here's the twist. God has given you a solution to the messiness and sorrow of life and how important and good it is: resurrection. Not just general resurrection, but resurrection, here and now, like for Lazarus that day. Resurrection for living. Resurrection for sorrow.

As a pastor, I usually feel helpless when people are living through times of death and loss. Actually, I personally feel really lame. And I admit, at funerals, I thought talking about the resurrection was just a band aid and a weak attempt to say "Look on the bright side. There's the resurrection"; until just this week I realized that it's *Jesus* who reminds us of the resurrection. It's His idea. The resurrection isn't just some man-made band aid to help sad people through their sorrow and loss. It's Jesus' true reality! It's not just pie in the sky for someday. The resurrection is the reality of God breaking through the sorrow, breaking through our sorrow, into our world, that we might know just how important life is. The resurrection is God's mending of it!

Jesus hung on the resurrection and life, and lived it—not for *some* day, but for today. As the perfect human, Jesus understood a principle which psychologists have only recently understood. **Any experience for which you do not make the required payment of emotion, you will later pay for with compound interest.** Especially the emotions of sorrow and grief. They are natural, normal, human, and helpful. You never need to be ashamed of weeping or withdrawing for a time, or getting help from your closest friends, or praying, or talking about heaven and the resurrection. This is the right way, the Christ-like way, the healthy and rich and full way to handle sorrow.

This week, imagine if we got it right. Imagine if we could feel life and offer life as deeply as Jesus. When you believe, His Holy Spirit lives in you, you know. Imagine what would happen this week if we didn't skim through our relationships and our emotions. Imagine if you treated your life this week with the importance that can only be felt in some times of deepest sorrow? Imagine if you were the one your friends and neighbors could call on in their grief, because they knew first, that you felt life that deeply; that you cared enough to walk through sorrow with them, and second, that you were one who knew the power and could speak of resurrection for their life today? Sound daunting? It is. It's *new life* we're offering in Jesus' name. But remember, you don't have to go seeking for the resurrection; because Jesus, "*the resurrection and the life*" has first loved you, and sought *you* out. **And when you look at the face of Jesus, you see life...and resurrection itself...looking back at you.**