

# The Day Death Died



## TouchPoint 9

“Jesus wept.” Those two words make up the first Bible trivia question every child who grows up in church learns. It’s the shortest verse in the Bible, and it comes from John 11. It may be short, but there’s a lot we can unpack from it.

The notion of God weeping is startling to some people. What on earth (or in heaven, for that matter) would move God to tears? Shouldn’t God be above emotion? And who usually cries tears, if it’s not someone who’s on the bad end of some tragedy or in pain?

The story in John 11 is a very personal one for Jesus. Seems one of His best friends, a guy by the name of Lazarus got sick – sick enough that his sisters, Mary and Martha felt he wouldn’t live through it. And they were right. Lazarus ended up dying.

Before his death, however, they sent an urgent message to Jesus to come heal him right away or they felt he’d die. When Jesus got the word, He was strangely sanguine about it:

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. Yet when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days. Then He said to His disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” John 11.5-7 (NIV)

Jesus had quite a history with this family. Their home was where He’d go when the Messiah business got to be too much. He could spend a few days with them for some much needed R & R, and then hit the road again refreshed and ready to take on the world.

Because of what Jesus wanted to teach everyone, He was willing to live with the anger and frustration generated by His delayed response to his friends’ request. When He was ready to go, He said this to His disciples (His closest followers):



“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” Jesus had been speaking of His death, but His disciples thought He meant natural sleep. So then He told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe...let us go to him.” John 11:11-15

When Jesus finally got there, Lazarus had been dead for four days. In fact, they'd already wrapped Him in burial clothes and put Him in a tomb (a rock-cave with a huge stone place in front of it). He wasn't just dead. He was really dead!

When Martha heard Jesus was just around the corner she went out to meet him. She was respectful but clearly frustrated: “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” John 11:21. A few verses later when Mary came out to meet Jesus, she said the same thing. “If you'd only have been here...”

**“If you had been here my brother would not have died”**

They obviously had great faith in Jesus. They knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that had He been there, Lazarus would have been cured of his illness, and they'd all be having dinner together right now instead of entertaining the mourners down from Jerusalem to help them grieve.

It never occurred to them that Jesus might have something up His sleeve. It never occurred to them that maybe, just maybe, death wasn't the final thing it seemed to be after all. And it never occurred to them that Jesus was there to prove it.

Mary and Martha are no different than people who live in any generation. Death seems so violently final. There seems to be no argument that will hold up against it. Every parent knows the moment they first hold their newborn that he or she will die, too. Death always wins every argument. Well, almost always...

It was in response to Mary and Martha's broken-hearted, anguished cry that God broke down and cried. But it was also when Jesus made a very bold statement. This is the kind of statement only one who is God could make:

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” John

11:23-26

I am the resurrection and the life, He said. Told you it was bold. And He proved it. He asked for them to roll the stone away, which they did over protest (four days is plenty of time for a dead body to start smelling like one). When Jesus called for Lazarus to come out of the tomb, they wondered who would go in there to carry him out. But that's not what Jesus meant!

After a few awkward moments, a fully-wrapped, now-living human mummy appeared trying to inch along using legs tightly bundled in grave clothes! As people gasped and fainted and shouted and laughed, Jesus asked them to please unwrap the poor guy so he could be free!

The unthinkable happened! At the voice of Jesus, death slinked away with a whimper! I wish I could have been there that evening to listen to the conversation they had over supper. I'll bet it turned their world upside down!

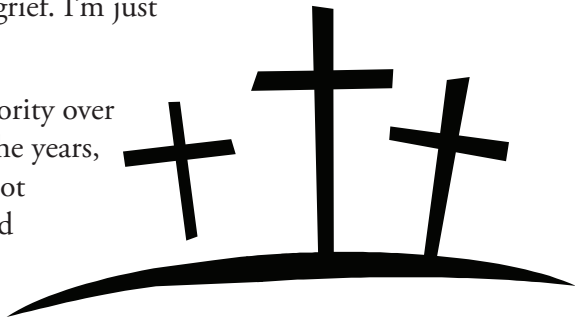
### **Authority Over Death**

So why did Jesus weep? It wasn't because He was broken Himself. It wasn't because He was powerless to do something about what He saw. And personally, I'm glad God isn't above emotion, because it means He is touched by the needs of His creation.

Jesus cried because this was the very thing He had warned the first humans about. He said if they ate the fruit He forbade, that death would be a part of life. And Jesus did not create us to die!

When He was with His friends and saw how heart-broken they were, He was moved by their emotion and by their despair. He never wanted us to experience this. Because death is common to every life, sooner or later every one of us will feel the searing tear death causes in our lives. He is touched by our brokenness. Jesus was there to show them that death isn't the last word, but He first paused to acknowledge and share in their grief. I'm just glad He didn't stop there!

From where did Jesus get this authority over death? As I've read the Bible over the years, I've begun to understand that it's not just that He was God that He could do this. But because He was God



who sacrificed Himself for us, that He now claims ultimate victory over death.

Here's what happened. When Jesus was condemned to die, He was placed on a Roman cross, a hideous and awful instrument whose only purpose was to kill with malice. It was the express desire of the hated Romans that anyone bent on causing enough trouble to merit death would be used as an example to scare anyone else tempted to misbehave by delivering punishment in the most inhumane way possible.

Jesus died after only six hours on the cross. The authorities were surprised because it was not uncommon that death on a cross – where your wrists and feet are literally nailed to a cross of heavy wood – could take upwards of a week in some cases. You die slowly and painfully, with constant fire-like surges of nerve pain shooting all through your body.

You have trouble getting your breath. So much so that many people who died on the cross did so from suffocation.

**“Jesus died after only six hours on the cross.”**

The cross never lost an argument. No one ever walked away from the cross. Except once. I'm going to ask you to pick up your Bible now, and turn to Luke 24 and read verses 1-12. As you read it, write down a few of the things that strike you about it:

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I don't know what struck you, but I couldn't help but notice how much this caught everyone by surprise. Even with prior notice by Jesus that this is exactly what would happen, they didn't figure on His death, and they were totally surprised that He rose again! It wasn't until later that they would remember some of the things He said that talked about this. Read John 10:17-18 and write down the startling thing Jesus said about Himself and His death:

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There was something that happens when a God lays down His life and then comes to life again! It's as if He's put the final word on death – and that word is ENOUGH!

There are a few more important verses in the Bible I want you to read before we finish up today. Each one has something important to say about death in the context of Jesus' life, sacrifice, and resurrection. Write down what you see as important in each one:

1 Corinthians 15:51-57 \_\_\_\_\_

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1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 \_\_\_\_\_

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Romans 5:6-18 \_\_\_\_\_

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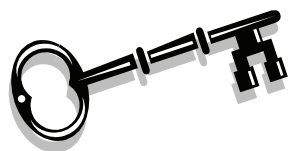
I don't know if the thought that death isn't the last word was new to you or not. Most of us have wondered about death and have grappled with its apparent finality. Whatever you may have thought about it before should be informed now by what the Bible says about it because of Jesus.

One final image. It comes from the very last book in the Bible, Revelation. One of Jesus' most dear friends and followers had lived a long and sometimes difficult life as a follower of Jesus, and he'd been exiled to an island prison colony called Patmos. John is his name, and Jesus chose him to be the conduit for the message of Revelation. In the very first chapter, Jesus appears to John in a vision-dream and underscores his authority over death. Here's the account:

When I (John) saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. Revelation 1:17-18.

John didn't have any trouble recognizing Jesus because he'd spent more than 3 years with Him in close association. John knew he was talking to a living Lord. Jesus spoke the by-now obvious: I hold the keys of death and Hades (a translation of a Hebrew word for the grave). Jesus holds the key! Jesus is the one in charge – He holds all the cards.

“Jesus holds the key!”



But there's something else I like. John is seeing a living God. John is once again witnessing the fact that Jesus is not dead, but fully alive, and is there to tell John all about the joy He is already plotting for the future for His followers.

Other so-called gods can't make the claim that Jesus does. When He arose from the dead, the Bible says that more than 500 witnesses confirmed that Jesus is alive. Just a few hours after breaking the hold of death, Jesus sat down and ate a fish dinner with His close friends. Jesus was no ghost, no illusion. He was real. Really alive.

There is something powerful beyond words to think of a truly living God. A living God with full understanding of our lives here. A living God with full understanding of what the human struggle is like. A living God who died, but who, through His resurrection, broke the domination of death on our world.

That's THE GOD who deserves my loyalty and allegiance. You'll have to decide that one for yourself. But choosing to worship this living God was the best choice I've ever made. •

# The Day Death Died

## Questions

What unusual thing did Jesus do when He saw the broken-hearted sorrow of His friends? (He cried)

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What does it say about a God who would do that? (that He is tender-hearted, and that He is touched by what hurts us)

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What was the real source of Jesus' tears? (in addition to His compassion, He was crying because people were suffering because of sin – the very thing He so desperately wanted us to never have to know about)

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How did Jesus kill death? (by His own, undeserved death)

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Was His own death a surprise to Jesus?

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In Romans 6.6-18, the author (Paul is his name) said a number of important things. What did He say about:

When it was that Jesus died for us... (while we were still sinners)

The state of our relationship with God... (we are reconciled to him)

Grace and life in comparison to sin and death... (grace comes by Jesus, and it is more powerful than death)

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What is the proof that Jesus really killed death? (his resurrection)

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And what good (beyond just knowing about it) is that proof to us? (by the power of His resurrection, we may look forward to one, too)

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Please send this answer sheet, either by e-mail or land mail

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