

Over 30 years ago a young man sensed God calling him into Christian ministry yet the man hesitated. He had deep questions about life, the world, the Bible. In the end what swung it for him was a verse in our reading, the shortest verse in the Bible, just two words – ‘Jesus wept’.

For all those big questions and issues we struggle to understand or accept, we find profound comfort in this, that the Son of God in Whom we trust, shed tears with His friends in their sorrow.

That young man was me, and to this day, while I still wonder at times about things as we all do, I am reassured enormously by this passage of scripture and this fact, that the Lord I seek to follow actually shed tears for us in our pain.

From this chapter of God’s Word let’s reflect on 3 things:

The Authority of Christ

The Compassion of our Saviour

The Comfort that is here for believers

This first one may seem obvious but let’s say it out loud and clear anyway that Jesus Christ has unique authority. Co-creator of the universe He is Lord of life and death. It is in His hand whether a person shall prosper or flounder, live or die, in this world or indeed in eternity.

There are just a couple of instances in the Old Testament where recently deceased people were brought back to life through the prayers of God’s prophets Elijah and Elisha, but these were rare occasions. Modern medicine can restart a heart that has stopped, revive a person who has momentarily died technically, but this is different. Lazarus has been dead over four days and is already buried. Normal decomposition would be setting in. Yet such is the authority of our Lord Jesus, Son of God, He could speak a word of command and those present witnessed Lazarus walk from his tomb alive once more!

This should increase our reverence for and faith in the Lord Jesus. This should encourage us to pray all the more in His name for He is the holy Judge, the gracious Saviour and His name carried life-giving authority.

Amazing as this is, those who believe in the God of the Bible are not completely surprised. The God Who ordained the laws of the universe is free to overrule on occasions and do those things we call miracles. And reading the New Testament Gospels we have come to almost expect miraculous things to happen when Jesus is involved.

What some of us find more amazing is our second point today, this intriguing detail that when Jesus saw the sisters' grieving, crying in the graveyard, *He cried too!*

He must have known He could and would raise and give their brother back to them. Why isn't He smiling in anticipation? Why does the Son of God weep?

The passage says Jesus on this occasion was 'deeply moved in spirit and troubled'. There is a sense of frustration implied here. The Lord seems to be expressing an intense, godly rage against sin and its deadly consequences. The Creator and Lord of Life grieves at the bitter intrusion of death. This was not how He meant it to be when He made the heavens and the earth and mankind, male and female in His own image. These are tears of righteous indignation at that which spoils the beauty and harmony and loving fellowship of all He ordained in the beginning.

Oh but they are more. One of the lovely things about the passages that mention Mary and Martha and Lazarus from Bethany is how it appears the Son of God actually had friends while here on earth. We're told they showed Him hospitality on different occasions.

So Jesus is not just weeping for the sin and sorrow of the world in general, He is specifically feeling and sharing with His friends in their loss.

This is the Lord I gladly worship and follow and serve! One Who is easily God-enough to do the seemingly impossible and raise the dead, but also human and man enough to actually feel our pain.

Did we ever need evidence that God cares? Here it is. Jesus wept. Let us follow then the Life-Giver Who genuinely cares for us!

Noting thirdly here important lessons for Christian belief and practice. Here is the unique comfort Jesus gives to those who trust in Him. He says, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies; and he who lives and believes in me will never die.'

We humans are created as a union of body and soul. Jesus promises complete salvation for both.

Jesus is 'the resurrection'. When a Christian dies we lay their body to rest in the cemetery as if sleeping, looking forward to the day when Christ will return and raise us like Himself victorious over death to enjoy forevermore a renewed heavens and earth.

Jesus is also 'the life'. Meantime our souls never die but are kept safe with Him in heavenly peace and security. So we treat the body with dignity and reverence, comforted that the soul of a loved one who has trusted Christ for this life is already consciously enjoying a taste of eternal life with their Master, as we sometimes say 'in a much better place'.

Now well-meaning people will often say this, even about people who have never practised Christian faith but lived however they pleased. However resurrection and eternal life are not something we can dare take for granted! Jesus asked Martha, 'Do you believe this?' This family clearly did trust in Jesus, welcomed Him to a place of honour in their live and obeyed His instructions. So to them, and obedient believers like them come these precious promises.

This greatest of comforts in the face of our human mortality and inevitable sorrow is gladly, freely, generously given - to those who humbly trust and follow Jesus.

Let's be sure that we have done so and are doing so today!