

The 'I am' Sayings of Jesus
v. "I am the Resurrection and the Life"
John 11:25

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is the climactic miracle of John's gospel, the last of seven miracles inserted just before the beginning of the final week of Christ's earthly ministry. Moreover, it contains the fifth of seven 'I am' saying of Jesus viz. "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die and whoever lives by believing in me will never die" (John 11:26). It also contains the shortest verse in Scripture: "Jesus wept" (v35). As such it highlights both the divinity of Jesus, his power over life and death, as well as his humanity, his ability to grieve in the face of loss.

Jesus was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (v34) in the face of death and loss. The word in the original depicts the snorting of a horse at the prospect of battle or staggering under a heavy load. Jesus was familiar with grief as we are, "A man of sorrow and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3). As one commentator put it, "He gathered up into his personality, all the misery resulting from sin, represented in a dead man and broken-hearted people round him".

A compassionate God moved by suffering humanity, was a novel and shocking idea in Christ's day, particularly among the Greeks to whom John was writing. For Greek philosophers the primary characteristic of God was 'apathea' from which we get the word 'apathy', indifferent, lack of feeling, couldn't care. However, the Greek word meant the inability to feel any emotion at all. God could not feel anger, love, pain, disappointment or any other emotion. They reasoned that if a person can feel sorrow or joy, gladness or grief this meant that someone else can have an effect upon another. It follows that someone exercises power over another, at least momentarily. But no one can have power over God. By implication God cannot have feelings. He can be approached through reason perhaps but not on the basis of his love or pity.

Jesus gives us a very different picture of God. He wept. He revealed a God who enters into the anguish of his people and grieves with them in their affliction. The response to Jesus' tears was equally moving, "See how he loved him!" (v36). Whilst our sorrow is linked to our fallen human nature due to original sin, not so God. He is the Eternal One, the same yesterday, today and forever. "He does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). He is sovereign over all, never taken aback or surprised. That notwithstanding, he shares our pain and loss and tears.

- i. *He notices our tears (v33a)*
'He hears the cry of the afflicted (Job 34:28).
'The Lord has heard the voice of my weeping' (Ps 6:8).
- ii. *He is touched by our tears (v33b)*
'He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled'
'The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry' (Ps 34:15).
No prayer will ever prevail with God more surely than a liquid petition (CH. Spurgeon)
- iii. *He remembers our tears and they are special to him*
'You number my wandering. Put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book' (Ps 56:8).
If you are God's child, he treasures your tears and remembers them long after you have forgotten them.
- iv. *He acts to remove tears*
Jesus first wept, but then raised Lazarus and restored him to his sisters. In the same way, the Father notices our tears but also acts to remove them.
"He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces" (Isa 25:8).

Standing at the entrance of Lazarus' tomb, Jesus instructs the bystanders 'Take away the stone' (v39), calls in a loud voice 'Lazarus come out' (v43), whereupon he says 'Take off the grave clothes and let him go' (v44). Resurrection life and spiritual release are God's prerogative. True we cannot bring the dead back to life. But we can bring God's word to them. We can help remove stones of ignorance, error and prejudice and graveclothes of doubt, fear and discouragement. In the words of AW Pink 'There is no higher privilege this side of heaven than for us to be used of the Lord in rolling away gravestones and removing grave-clothes.