

SERMON MATERIAL – PART 1

John 11:35 ... “Jesus wept.”

Young pastors sometimes ask me to supply them with topics for sermons. When I speak in churches, I am asked for my sermon outlines. I do not mind helping other pastors by providing them with ideas or outlines. However, I am curious why they need such help. I find sermon, devotional and teaching content in every verse in the Bible.

Today's verse is the shortest in the Bible. It became that in the 1500s when the Bible was first broken down into chapters and verses. In the original Greek and Hebrew, the Bible was a flowing narrative. I am glad our Bibles have chapters and verses because it helps in studying it and informing others. However, I am still astonished to find pastors who struggle to find sermon material in the Bible.

If you are a pastor, can you find a sermon in today's verse? If you are a Sunday (or Sabbath) school teacher, can you find it? If you are simply reading your Bible for your own enlightenment, can you find the special message contained in the two words of today's verse? I could speak on it for an hour. The key to studying the Bible, or preaching from it, is to study it in context with the passages before and after.

So, what is the basis for a sermon from today's verse? First, it reminds us that Jesus came to earth as a human, which is supported throughout the New Testament. At various times in his short life he wept and produced tears, he was tired and needed rest, and he ate and drank, just like his disciples. In his torture and death, he experienced great physical pain and bled real blood, then he died a physical death. In his humanity he had pity on the poor, sadness for the sick, and sorrow for the dead. He expressed anger at those who defiled the temple. These are all human traits.

In the context of the entire passage from which today's verse comes, we learn that Jesus wept when he heard that his friend Lazarus had died. In verse 38 we read that Jesus “groaned” in his spirit. The true value of today's verse is not that Jesus was sad about Lazarus, but that he was frustrated with his followers who failed to believe what he had been teaching them, especially verse 26: “...I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live.” Lazarus had already died and claimed his reward as a child of God. But to prove that the Father had power over life and death, Jesus raised the man from the dead. I wonder if Lazarus was disappointed to be brought back to life. I would have been. But for the greater good, Jesus raised him to prove the power of God and that God had sent the Son to demonstrate that.

This is the 773rd devotional I have written since we started posting them on Facebook in 2013. Am I running out of topics? Never. There are 31,102 verses in the Bible, and often, there are multiple teachings in each verse. If you are a pastor or Bible teacher, start reading your Bible. It is the ultimate and endless source of teaching content. It is okay to supplement your study with the writing of other good teachers, but the Bible is your best source.

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