



JOHN 11:38-44

Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. "Take away the stone," he said.

"But, Lord," said Martha, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odour, for he has been there four days."

Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"
(verses 38-40)

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"Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb."

This short sentence parallels a scene just a few verses earlier. *"When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled"* (verse 33).

In both cases we're told that Jesus was *"deeply moved."* It's a surprising phrase. Our English translations soften the meaning by focusing it on inner grief or pain. But the Greek word that John uses in both these verses actually speaks of anger. Elsewhere, it's used of the angry snorting of horses. When used of people it refers to deep indignation and outrage.

As a result, one conservative commentator, B.B. Warfield, makes this comment: *"What John tells us, in point of fact, is that Jesus approached the grave of Lazarus in a state, not of uncontrollable grief but of inexpressible anger."*

Why? What's happening? Why is Jesus angry?

There are two possibilities, both of which give helpful insight. The first is that Jesus sees the unbelief of those surrounding the tomb, and it raises anger in him. He himself is standing at that tomb ready to work the miracle of resurrection and life in Lazarus' experience. He knows it will display glory, so that God's work may be shown in Lazarus' life. Yet those at the tomb are full of unbelief, grieving *"like the rest of men, who have no hope"* (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

That unbelief provokes anger. Not that it diminishes Jesus' love. Not in the least. As Paul will later tell us: *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). Jesus loves all those at the tomb. But their unbelief stands in the way of them receiving all he has to offer. Indeed, some will go away later in the day, ready to report Jesus to the chief priests and Pharisees, without ever grasping the glory of God that is revealed. Their unbelief will persist, even after the miracle.

Unbelief gets in the way. It might very well be the cause of Jesus' anger.

But there is, of course, a second dynamic at work at that tomb: death. There, at the tomb of his friend, Jesus comes face to face with death itself, together with the pain it causes, and the sin that lies behind it, wreaking such havoc in a fallen world.

Again, B.B. Warfield comments: *"The spectacle of the distress of Mary and her companions enraged Jesus because it brought poignantly home to his consciousness the evil of death, its unnaturalness, its 'violent tyranny' ... and he advances to the tomb, in Calvin's words, 'as a champion who prepares for conflict.'"*

And Jesus won! He cried out: *“Lazarus, come out!”* (verse 43) – and Lazarus did.

Later, with even greater determination, Jesus went to his own grave. Dead and buried, he rose again to life, triumphing over death for all time.

Still today, unbelief and sin and death stand in the way. Each angers our Champion. He comes to our aid. He clears them away. He brings life. Receive.

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Lord Jesus, thank you that you take these enemies so seriously. You have overcome death. You have paid the price of sin. And you give us the very faith we need in order to respond to your gift. Thank you. Praise your name. I receive.

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Reflect:

Is there a circumstance in your own life, or in that of a friend, in which Jesus would respond with anger because of his deep abiding love? Reflect. Step onside with Jesus. Receive him as your Champion, once again.