

Not My Will: Sorrow - Grave Clothes

John 11:17–37, 16:20–22, 20:3-8; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Romans 6:4

We are beginning a new series called Not My Will. It will be a journey of surrender. But surrender does not begin in strength. It begins in sorrow.

We love resurrection. We love celebrations. We love empty tombs. We love peeps and Cadbury Eggs. But we don't really love the sorrow part of this story do we? In fact, before Jesus faces sorrow of his own, he walks into someone else's sorrow.

Sorrow:

Read John 11:17-37. When Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus has been dead for four days. Martha comes out to meet Him. She is grieving yet she says something remarkable:

“I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God.”

Martha is often remembered from Luke 10 as the busy one. But here, she is a woman of deep faith. In the middle of heartbreak, she trusts. Martha is showing us that faith does not eliminate sorrow. It coexists with it.

Mary comes next. She falls at Jesus's feet weeping. Then John tells us something profound in verses 33–38. Jesus is deeply moved. Troubled. Agitated. And then—“Jesus wept.” John makes sure we see Jesus's emotions.

In the Greek world of that day, many believed God was detached, unemotional, untouched by human mess. But that is not the God revealed in Christ. We see compassion. Anger towards death. Sorrow. Even frustration.

We have a God who is not distant from suffering. He steps into it. And here is something powerful: Jesus knew resurrection was minutes away. He knew Lazarus would walk out, but He still wept. Why?

Maybe he empathized with their grief. Maybe He was grieved at the unbelief around Him. Maybe He was sorrowful over what sin had done to the world. Death was never part of God's original design. Maybe His tears were sorrow over the condition of a broken world. And yet—He did not withdraw from it. He walked toward it.

When Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb, it sets His own death in motion. After this miracle, the leaders decide He must die. Calling Lazarus out sealed Jesus' fate, but He did it anyway. That is surrender...Not My Will. Jesus chooses obedience knowing it will lead Him to the cross.

Grave Clothes:

Lazarus comes out of the tomb still wrapped in grave clothes. Jesus says: “Unbind him, and let him go.” (John 11:44) Lazarus is alive—but still bound. Others have to unwrap him. Now fast forward to John 20. When Peter and John run to the tomb, they find something fascinating.

Read John 20:3-8. John 20:7 tells us the linen wrappings were lying there. The face cloth—the soudarion that had been around His head—was separate from the body wrappings. John describes it as rolled up, wrapped up, or set apart.

The grave clothes looked almost like an empty cocoon—as if Jesus had passed right through them. A grave robber would not unwrap a body carefully. They would not leave linens arranged as though still shaped around Him.

Some interpret the rolled face cloth as a Hebrew custom: if a master folded his napkin at a meal, it meant, “I’m coming back.” That interpretation is popular, though historically debated. The Greek word likely means rolled or wrapped rather than neatly folded in a modern sense.

But here’s what we can say with confidence: the scene communicates order, dignity, and deliberateness. This was not a hurried theft. It was a divine resurrection. Jesus did not struggle out of the grave clothes. . . . He passed through them. Lazarus had to be unbound. Jesus needed no one. Lazarus would die again. Jesus conquered death permanently.

And when John saw the empty cocoon of linen, he believed. It wasn’t until the disciples saw it that they remembered that Jesus had said this would happen.

Grief into Joy:

Before there was an empty cocoon in John 20, there was weeping in John 11. In Matthew 26 at Gethsemane, Jesus cries out that His Soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death before He is captured and taken away to be slain.

Before there was a rolled face cloth. . . there were tears. Before resurrection. . . there was grief. Jesus Himself said in John 16:20–22, *‘Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.’*

The world rejoiced while the disciples wept at the crucifixion. But three days later? Everything is reversed. The world’s values often run opposite of God’s values. What looks like defeat becomes victory. What looks like the end becomes the beginning.

That’s hard when you’re in the sorrow stage. But Jesus says: *“You have grief now. . . but I will see you again, and no one will take your joy.”* Resurrection joy is untouchable joy.

Worldly vs Godly Sorrow:

When we say resurrection begins in sorrow, we need to clarify something. Read 2 Corinthians 7:10.

There are two kinds of sorrow. Worldly sorrow is being sorry you got caught, feeling sorry for the consequences, and feeling sorry for the embarrassment.

Godly sorrow leads to transformation. For example, think of the disciples Peter and Judas. Both failed Jesus. Both denied Him. Peter wept—and repented. Judas despaired—and

perished. They had the same failure, yet their sorrow was different. One led to restoration while one led to destruction.

Resurrection begins in the kind of sorrow that turns us toward Jesus. Sorrow, according to the will of God, leads to life.

Some of us are alive in Christ, but still wearing grave clothes: shame, old identities, addictions, fear, bitterness.

Lazarus came out alive but bound to death. Jesus walked out leaving the grave clothes behind clinging to life everlasting.

Read Romans 6:4. The Christian life is not managing grave clothes. It's leaving them behind.

Reflection:

As we begin this Lenten journey, ask yourself: Where is your sorrow? What feels dead? What feels final? What feels buried? Jesus stands at graves. He weeps with us and he calls us by name. Then He speaks life.

The grave clothes in John 20 tell us something powerful: Resurrection was not chaotic. It was not rushed. It was not desperate. It was deliberate. And if God can bring order out of a tomb, He can bring order out of your sorrow. You may have grief now, but sorrow is not the end of the story. Resurrection begins there. And the One who walked out of the grave is walking with you now.

Reflection Questions:

- How does it change your view of suffering to know that Jesus steps into sorrow rather than avoiding it?
- Jesus left His grave clothes behind permanently. What would it look like for you to stop “managing” old patterns and truly leave them behind?
- Are you grieving consequences... or are you allowing sorrow to transform your heart?
- If resurrection begins in sorrow, what might God be resurrecting in you through your current pain?