



Tears of Joy

Tears are a natural, important function of our perfectly created body. When they are in short supply, we say we have dry eyes and need artificial tears. When we were toddlers, we learned to use them to our best advantage. When we were teenagers, we cried when any drama struck our lives. We cried at our wedding; we cried at the sight of our newborn child; we cried at the death of a loved one.

Scripture tells us many instances of weeping by the people of God. Sometimes they were tears of sorrow. Abraham wept when he buried Sarah. Hezekiah wept when he pleaded with God to lengthen his life. The children of Israel wept over their sin. Hannah wept before God as she prayed earnestly for a son. David wept when he received the news about the death of his son, Absalom. Peter wept bitterly when he realized he had betrayed Jesus, just as He had said Peter would. And of course, Jesus wept in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Sometimes they were tears of joy. Jacob and Esau wept when they were reunited. Joseph cried after he talked to his brothers, when he met Benjamin, and again when he saw his father. With a little imagination, we can see Hannah crying tears of joy after Eli announced to her that God would send her a son. Scripture tells us that *her face was no longer sad* (1 Samuel 1:18).

Let's continue to use our imagination as we remember three instances of weeping in the New Testament. Jesus and His disciples came upon a funeral procession in the city of Nain. A widow's son had died and was being carried to his grave. In the seventh chapter of Luke we read that Jesus told the mother "*Do not weep,*" and He raised the young man from the dead and gave him back to his mother. Do you think her tears changed to tears of joy?

John, in the eleventh chapter, tells us of the death of Lazarus. When Jesus comes to the home of Mary and Martha, not only they but many Jews were weeping. In fact, *Jesus wept* (John 11:35). But then Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Do you think Mary and Martha's tears were changed to tears of joy?

The third incident (in John 20) takes place on Easter morning. Mary Magdalene had gone to Jesus' tomb and when she got there, Jesus was gone! As she was weeping in the garden, Jesus found her and just by hearing Him call her name, she recognized Him. Do you think her tears were changed to tears of joy?

Scripture doesn't specifically tell us, but we can imagine that each one of these women expressed her great happiness with tears of joy. And what made the difference? Jesus came into the situation. Jesus comforted them, loved them, and gave them hope. And He does the same for us today. When I sat at the bedside of my comatose son and when I held my dying husband's hand, my tears were sorrowful. But Jesus gave me the joy that only He can give through His Spirit. And because of the hope He brought, my tears were also tears

of joy. We can *hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful* (Hebrews 10:23).

Our prayer is that of St. Paul in the fifteenth chapter of Romans: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope* (Romans 15:13).

“How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds,” LSB 524, or “When Peace, Like a River,” LSB 763, could be used as a closing hymn.

Scripture references are from the ESV.

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