

The Corpse in the Funeral Procession

The Dead Live Again

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Well, this morning is our second installment in the series that I've chosen to do leading up to and through Easter Sunday morning, "The Dead Live Again." Today, we look at "The Corpse in the Funeral Procession." That's over in Luke chapter 7. We'll get to there in just a moment.

First, these thoughts. The moment you are born, in effect, you begin to die. Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. The Bible says in Ezekiel 18:20, the soul that sinneth shall surely die. And Romans 3:23 reminds us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And Romans 3:10, as it is written, there is none righteous, not even one. Because of sin, death has metastasized in the human race. Death cannot be avoided. It cannot be halted. Basically, every heartbeat, every breath, every response of your nervous system to any stimuli is one less than the whole that you've been allotted for this life. The Bible says our days are numbered. Psalm 139 verse 16, your eyes have seen my unformed substance and in your book were all written the days that were ordained for me when as yet there was not one of them. Hebrews 9:27 reminds us and inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment. Death is indeed the great leveler. Death is the great equalizer. The small, the profane, the weak, the worldly insignificant, the vile, the corrupt, the debased, likewise the admirable, the powerful, the dominant, the brilliant, the successful, the wealthy. It doesn't matter. All alike will die.

The day you were born, you were placed by the strong hands of sin into the downward stream toward death. That stream continues all along consistently and unhindered, and as we grow older, we can hear in the distance the raging torrent of the falls over which we will plunge into death. This stream of sin and death brings increasing weakness and frailties and decay and ultimately the corruption of the grave. And there has been no advances whatsoever in the realm of mankind to reverse this haunting downward trajectory. Man has toiled, striven even in desperation to devise a reversal to this downward flow that will end in our death and our corruption. You can shout loud into the corridors of medical history and all scientific research and inquiry and the only thing you will hear back is a deafening silence. A silence that seems to shout, "We have no cure. We have no answer. We cannot reverse the stream." Death's dark domain and the grave's corruption still awaits us all.

But Jesus. Luke 7 verse 11. What a story. What a truth and what a glory we have here. Starting in verse 11, Luke chapter 7,

11 Soon afterwards He [that's Jesus] went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. 12 Now as He approached the gate of the city, [a corpse] a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep." 14 And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" 15 The dead man [you can translate it corpse] the corpse sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. 16 Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!" 17 This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.

So we see our Lord here going to a city called Nain. It's a it's a very, very small place. It's nowhere else mentioned in the word of God. It probably was only visited by our Lord this one time. Nain lies to the south of Mount Tabor, about 12 miles from Capernaum. In our day and time, you might have said it's a town with one stoplight, just a little place. But this glorious miracle our Lord's going to perform here was witnessed by a lot of people even though it was a small town because there was a large throng of people following Jesus and his disciples, and then there was quite a funeral procession coming out of the town at the same time. Now, this was a divine appointment. Things just didn't happen with God and things just didn't happen with Jesus. This is foreordained from the foundation of the world. Jesus went there on a providential purposeful mission to prove his glory, his power, that he was God and to show tender compassion to this dear lady who had lost her son.

I outline it this way, I., notice the dire setting. The dire setting. Here we have in this little city, this poor widow lady coming out in the funeral procession and her son has died and he's being carried along on the shoulders of men. He's but a corpse of course. You know, nothing fills one life with fear and dread like the nearness of death. Death is the inescapable certainty. The word death, matter of fact, or dead or died does not even appear in the Bible until Genesis chapter 5, verse 5, where the Bible says, "So all the days of Adam that Adam lived were 930 years and he died." And that same pronouncement since that point continues all the way up through today's internet obituary column. Men keep dying. Now, God did not create man to die. Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, and that brought death into the human race and death has been the ever-present companion of men ever since.

The Bible says in verse 12, this man, this corpse is carried out. Literally, the idea is he was being carried out, and there's a reason for that. And in the ancient world, in the Jewish ancient world, I guess I should say, uh a dead body was considered spiritually unclean. It was spiritually contaminated, and and you were supposed to spend as little

time as possible around a dead corpse. You were not to go to tombs. Remember all the whitewashed tombs, Jesus talked about the whitewashed tombs? It wasn't to beautify the tomb, it was to let you know that was a place of a dead body. Don't go near it or you'll be ceremonially and spiritually unclean before a holy God. So they had no embalming method as such in ancient Israel and so they'd put a few spices, some oils on the body and quickly that very day the person died get outside the city to an unclean place, if you will, to leave the body.

I I remember the first time I went to London and uh we were being shown around to the early Baptists in in in Great Britain who were uh separatists. They were not part of the Church of England, that is the Anglican Church. And so the Baptists were considered unclean. They could not be buried within the city limits of London so they had graveyards outside the gate for the Baptists because they were the unclean ones. That's kind of the picture here.

He's unclean, he's being carried out, and of course, always in a funeral procession there is sadness. Every every week or two we'll drive down our roads in the Shoals area and there'll be a funeral procession and it always makes your heart heavy. You pull over to the side of the road, you feel sad for the life that is lost and for the loved ones who are left behind. And I thought about what a contrast that is. When we have weddings, you know, often there's shouting, there's rice, there's sparklers, there's fireworks, there's horns going off, there's just there's excitement, but I've never seen anything like that around a funeral procession because it's a dire situation when someone dies, because death only takes, death doesn't give back.

Psalm 89 verse 48 reminds us, "What men can live and not see death?" Job 7:9 through 10, "When a cloud vanishes, it is gone, So he who goes down to Sheol does not come up. He will not return again to his house, Nor will his place know him anymore." You do understand everything you have, somebody else is gonna have it soon. You're just a steward, you're just a part-time overseer of somebody else's stuff. We better use it for the Lord, use our stuff for something that counts for eternity.

You know, cemeteries are a place of the dead. I I rode by the cemetery just recently and I saw it was trying to green up and things, a few trees are budding and there's some beauty there, but immediately my heart went to the fact that no, there's a it's a place of just corpses, dead bodies. It's a it's a dire situation death and the funeral service is a dire setting.

Notice in this particular one though, there is even increasingly from that deep sorrow and the text spells it out very clearly in verse 12. Notice what it says, "as He approached the gate of the city, a corpse, a dead man was being carried out," and here's the phrase that shows you the deep sorrow of this particular parting, "the only son of his mother, and she was a widow." Now that day, it meant a whole lot more than it means today to lose your husband and then lose your only male child. While death always brings sorrow and grief, this funeral possession was one of deeper sorrow. You see, in this day, a wife was completely dependent upon her husband for everything and if her husband died, then she

looked to her son; typically if there's more than one son it was the older son and he was responsible to take care of her. But to lose both of those like this lady, to lose your husband and then lose your only son, that means you lost everything you had to give you a decent subsistence in culture or in society. To lose the both of them was of the greatest misfortune conceivable. The mourning the Bible, well someone said concerning this, the mourning of a widow for her only son is the extremity of grief. So to be without her husband and son meant she was most likely destined for an abject life of homelessness and poverty and literally being on the street begging for scraps. Have you ever studied the book of Ruth? They were destitute, were they not, Naomi and Ruth? In that culture, if you did not have a man, you had nothing. During her husband's life, this woman devoted herself to him and he was devoting himself to support her. And then when her husband died, she looked to her son to take care of her. He was bound by love and law to do so. But a husbandless, sonless woman in this day had little left to live for. Deep sorrow.

And on top of that, the the religious doctrine of the day, not biblical doctrine, but the man-made doctrine of the day would tell that woman in that situation, you must be very unclean and you must be very ungodly for God to do this to you. It was an awful teaching, cold and heartless, that somehow her plot was her own sinfulness that brought this upon her. I thought how that is with sin, how sin just makes everything deeper and more sorrowful than it was before. For example, a woman who is given the glorious and wonderful, precious blessing from God to be able to conceive children and gestate children and birth children and nurture children and bring children into the world, what a wondrous blessing that is, but because of sin, a woman now has chain pain rather in childbirth. And then we have these radical feminists today who disdain the whole concept of childbirth and child-rearing and nurturing children. What a what a vicious and ungodly spirit that is. It's a glorious thing, but sin marks it with sorrow and pain. Just the way sin is. Sorrow comes and goes in varying degrees into the final day of life. Even when God in common grace gives us many days of joy and happiness, yet sorrow seems to be not very far away. But don't blame God. The Scriptures do not allow this. It is man that brought death, sin, and sorrow into the culture that we live in. It's really a gracious gift of God we don't deserve that we continual continual sinners are giving any given any joys and any happiness.

So it's a dire setting in a very particular and specific way. It's a it's a deep sorrow that this dear woman faces. III now, divine compassion. Praise the Lord for his divine compassion. We get to verse 13 and it says, "When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her." Now, nobody sought the Lord. In other situations, we people see people seeking out the Lord, "Would you come help? Would you come uh fix my daughter," raise Jairus' daughter, whatever it may be. "Would you come? Lazarus has died." We'll look at that next time. But nobody sought the Lord here. The Lord came to this place and he is just moved with compassion for this dear lady.

Jesus could have righteously walked on by her knowing that death and sorrow, they're the just consequence of sin and we've all sinned. Jesus is just. His divine retribution will be executed against all sin and all wrong wrong. There is nothing in holy justice that requires Jesus to do anything other than to punish sin and sinners. However, he doesn't

just possess holy justice, he possesses holy love. Love. And this love moves him to compassion. It moves him to sympathy for all of us in our weak and helpless and sorrowful condition.

Uh one scholar says that the mercy of God, the way it's developed in Scripture means, now listen, that God has the most miserable as the object of his care and concern. And compared to Holy God, we're miserable beings. Today man is so self-deceived. Today man is so full of pride. He is so self-assured that he thinks that God looks on us and God sees something so lovely and so desirable that he can't help but be moved with compassion toward us. Nothing could be further from the truth. Naturally, we are vile and offensive to a holy God. We are, according to Ephesians 2:3, the children of wrath. That means our very being stirs God to want to pour wrath upon us. Jeremiah says that God looks at our hearts and says they're only desperately wicked. And Romans 3:10 says there's no one good, no, not one.

You say, "What about this divine compassion, pastor? How does how does God have this deep compassion and love for us, even for Jesus to go to the cross to die for us?" Well, the answer is easy. The answer is easy, though impossible to comprehend. You see, it's not something in us that stirs God to have compassion for us, it's something in God that stirs God to have compassion for sinners like us. You need to be consumed with the person of God, not with your worth or well-being or deserving of anything because you are by nature just a child of wrath. It's not something in us, it's something in him.

Jesus comes upon this funeral procession by purpose with providential intentionality. He's moved with deep compassion for this lady and that includes the deep loss and the deep fear she must dread for her future life. Hebrews 4:15 reminds us, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." Friends, Jesus not only feels deeply for our sin and our lostness and that we face eternal wrath, but he feels deeply for our sorrows in daily life. Are you hurting today? Are you heartbroken today? Are you experiencing a loss and a loneliness? Well, you have one that the songwriter says, "Oh, what a tender, compassionate friend, He met the need of my heart, shadows dispelling, and with joy I am telling, He made all my darkness depart."

He is touched by our sorrows and here in our text, this woman in this dire and deeply sorrowful condition, it touched Jesus' heart. Verse 17 uh 13 rather says, "When he saw her." No, it says, "When the Lord saw her." Luke's very intentional here. Not just Jesus, but when the Lord saw her. No doubt he uses that title "Lord" purposefully. What he wants to point out is there is nothing too big for Jesus. Nothing too hard for him. He's Lord of everything, and he's Lord over death. Death can only touch those he allows it to touch, and death must release all that he commands death to release.

So in verse 13, in an imperative, a command, notice what he says to her, last three words, "Do not weep." It's a pretty strong statement. He looks at the lady and says, "Do not weep." It's a it's it's an imperative, a command. Now I don't think in any way Jesus is being harsh in this very tender moment. It's just that since he's on the scene, there's no

longer any need for grieving and sorrow. He's about to transform this whole situation from a gathering of gloom to a celebration of glory. Weeping didn't have any part here.

Verse 14, what a powerful image, "And He came up and touched the coffin." Man, this is this is good stuff. Most likely not a coffin like you and I see a coffin, you know, with a bottom and sides and a lid on top. I wished it was because I'd like to wax eloquent and talk about this boy kicking the lid off when Jesus said, "Get up." But most likely it was a hardened stretcher with a sheet over the boy. But that's pretty dramatic too as he fights his way out of that sheet after Jesus raises him from the dead. I mean, folks, this is real stuff. We have we have blessed hearts, churches that think if you do a spook house on Halloween you can help people get saved. I don't find any of that in the Bible but this right here, it's pretty spooky in a way. But glorious is it not?

He touches the coffin. He walks up as if he's to say, "I'm shutting this whole thing down." Puts his omnipotent hands on the coffin as if to say, "Stop it right here. This whole sorrow and dying thing is gonna stop right here with me." The Bible says in verse 14, those bearing the coffin stopped. They obey him. He says in verse 14, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" Here Jesus speaks to a corpse. He speaks to a dead man. I got to thinking about that and thinking, you know, that's not really that abnormal. Does it mean you're mentally unstable if you speak to dead people? You may have lost a loved one and walked through your house and there's John's favorite chair and just say, "Oh, John, there's your chair. Boy, I wish you could come sit in it." That's not, that's okay. I've presided over hundreds and hundreds of funerals and I very often have seen someone come up to the casket and speak and say, "You were the best mama. You were a wonderful daddy." It's not wrong. And Jesus speaks to the dead. But there's a real difference. When Jesus speaks to the dead, they hear him and they obey him.

Jesus said to this boy, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" Well, Jesus has power different than any other power. For example, the Old Testament prophets had power and did powerful things, but they were conduits through which God's Spirit flowed through them. They they they worked with a power outside of themselves. Elijah and Elisha had to get things together, like when the the fire came down and licked up the altar, they had to build the altar. But Jesus is different from all of that. Out of himself comes the power to stop death and restore life.

Verse 15 says, the corpse, the dead man sat up. My, my, my. Literally, the Greek means sat up the dead man. Uh it just, the Greek once you put emphasis on the verb, because he did something here, sat up the dead man. He's sitting straight up on that board they're carrying it out on. And it's the aorist verb. It means he sat up and he stayed up. He's not like, you remember me mocking the faith healers last Sunday? Well, they said this guy gets healed and wants to walk and he still can't walk. He's just struggling, just, not here. He was fully alive the moment Jesus spoke the powerful words. "Young man, I say to you, arise!"

Jesus' power changes the nature of things. Jesus' power spoke everything into existence out of nothing. So death is really a small thing for him. At least he's got something there

to work with, and he can bring it back into life. He reverses that thing. He turns this funeral procession into a celebration parade. He turns the coffin into a cocoon from which burst forth new life. He brings a grieving widow back into the state of a thankful mother. He turned a common street into a sanctuary for glorifying God. Romans 4:17 reminds us, "He who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist." What a truth. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown in their commentary says, quote, "Incarnate compassion summoning its absolute power to dry a widow's tears."

What a scene as the majesty and power of God comes forth in concert with the love and the grace of God. You see, only Jesus, now listen to this, only Jesus can reverse death, halt corruption and impart life. Here he gave back to this woman more than she ever lost because think about it from now on she's got her son back, but she's got a new hope she never had before. Nothing will ever happen to this woman again that shakes her up very badly because she's done seen, "I know a God that can fix anything." So she's got more than she ever had. She has her son back, but she has new hope. Today, let's all rejoice in the onliness of Jesus. The onliness of Jesus. Only Jesus has such deep compassion and love. Only Jesus has such power to reverse the curse of sin, the power to overcome death, and the power to impart new life. Jesus is all-powerful and he is all-compassionate. Others may have compassion for the sick and others may have compassion for the poor and others may have compassion in the loss of a loved one, but only Jesus has the power to do something about it. His divine power accomplishes through divine compassion.

Now I want to close, but let's think again to the image of verse 14 where Jesus comes up and he touches the coffin. Let's consider that again. The bearers come to a halt as he touches the coffin. In the Greek, the touch can mean a firm, enduring hold. It means he comes up and he's not letting go of this thing until he accomplishes what he purposes to accomplish. Jesus touched the coffin, the death box. He touched the coffin with his firm omnipotent hand to stop the coffin. That means to stop death. And he stopped death in its tracks.

What a spiritual truth this represents for all believers. He stopped death so death would have no power over the children. Do you think Jesus would come to this earth to purchase us to be his own family forever and let death get in the way of him having his family reunion? No way. He had to go in there and grab hold of death and get it stopped for us so we could be his forever, so that he would love us, joy in us, and treasure us for eternity and with changed, transformed hearts, we will love him, joy in him, and treasure him for eternity. And he's not going to let death get in the way of all that. I've got a glorious family reunion coming, and nothing can stop it. Nothing can stop it.

The Bible says in Hebrews 2:9, "So that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." That means he tasted it for us. When Jesus died, he entered the domain of death, figuratively, to make the point, I see him there in the tomb and there in the tomb, he takes those firm hands of omnipotence that stopped this coffin and he puts those hands on the shoulders of death. He looks death straight in the eye and says, "You're stopping right now. In fact, death, you're finished. Be gone from me." Death obeys the Lord, humbly departed the Lord's presence and flew to visit his kinsman, Satan. Satan, shocked

to see him, says to death in concern, "Death, why are you here? You're supposed to be in the tomb securing the body of Jesus." Death sheepishly looks down and responds to Satan and says, "Satan, He's alive. I couldn't hold Him. He told me I was finished. And Satan, He's left the tomb." What a glory.

Satan, sin, death could not hold him. You see, Jesus journeyed to death, that unclean place of sin and corruption, that he might reverse death's flow, that he might reverse death's course. Jesus supernaturally reverses the downward flow of sin, death, corruption in the grave. He rescues us so that we might do an about face. A divine reversal is in store for us. The curse of sin will be removed, death will be vanquished, and corruption is made to move backwards, back into vital, vibrant, new life for all of us, even, even life forevermore. Glory, glory, glory, glory. Death is now but a kind messenger that takes us to a better home because Jesus put his hands on him said, "You're done. This is stopping right here. You have no hold over Me and you will have no hold over any of My children." The dead do, the dead will live again.