

The Funeral Where Death Died (Luke 7:11-17)

1. The Sorrowful Scene (v.11-12)

After He had healed the centurion's servant (7:1-10), Jesus and His disciples (along with a "great crowd") trekked 25 miles south of Capernaum to Nain. Some manuscripts include "the next day."

A. The public sorrow:

- As Jesus, His disciples, and the great crowd drew near the gate of Nain, He intersected a funeral service for a widow who was "burying" her only son (v.12).
- Since the Jews did not embalm loved ones, funerals nearly always occurred on the same day that a person died, usually before the end of day.
- By law, Jews had to bury the dead outside the city (Num. 19:16; Deut. 21:22-23).
- The young man (son) who died was not carried in a coffin but on a bier (a couch-like structure that was heavier, bigger, and more substantial than a stretcher or a litter).
- If the family was wealthy, there were "paid" mourners and musicians that would accompany the procession.
 - Participation in funeral proceedings was not simply a social expectation but a rabbinic requirement. Even study of the Torah was suspended for funerals to allow people associated with the deceased to accompany their funeral procession.
 - The whole town showed support when a community member died (v.12).
- We are not sure whether Jesus heard the public mourners and accompanying music or saw the funeral procession.

B. The private sorrow:

- Immediate family members (nuclear) would frequently lead the procession with mourning and music.
- While all funerals have sorrow and sadness, this one is heartbreaking:
 - The woman is a widow and now burying her only son.
- In the Near East, there are no public services or retirement, as widows depend on their sons for financial support. She is in a precarious situation because she has no one to care for her. Previously, she buried her husband; now, she is burying her only son.

2. The Sovereign and Sympathizing Savior (v.13)

A. What Jesus felt:

- When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her.
 - The Greek word reveals a depth of pity. It means "bowels," which include the liver and lungs, where the seat of love and compassion was believed to be.
 - Jesus' compassion is greater than any man, as He possesses no sin. He enters this woman's sorrow at a greater degree than anyone else.
- God is described in Scripture as being a "friend of widows" (Ps. 68:5) and One that carries our sorrows (Isa. 53:4).

B. What Jesus said:

- Since the widow most likely led the funeral procession, it was easy to identify her. He spoke to her words that appeared to be harsh, insensitive, and rude:
 - He commanded her, "Do not weep."
- Jesus' words to her are cruel unless He can do something about her grief.

3. The Spectacular Scene (v.14-16)

- After Jesus commanded the woman not to weep, He continued to insert Himself in the procession by "touching the bier." The bearers "stood still" in shock at Jesus' chutzpah.
 - Jesus, being impervious to defilement, knew that the "law" required mercy, not sacrifice (Hos. 6:6). He cannot become ritually defiled as He is without sin.
 - In touching the bier, not only did the bearers stand still, but most likely the paid mourners and musicians also ceased.
- Jesus then spoke to the dead man, "Young man, I say to you, arise."
 - The young man was not there. His body (shell) was there, in the bier, but his soul was in Sheol (either in Abraham's bosom or hell).
 - Jesus demonstrates that "by His word," He can unite and summon the soul back to the body.
- In a linguistic wordplay, Luke noted that the "dead man sat up and began to speak."
 - Jesus commanded the young man's soul to return to his body and brought him back to full health whereby he sat up.
 - Not only did he sit up, but he also spoke. We are unsure of what he said and to whom he spoke, as the shrieks from the hundreds in attendance may have drowned out what was said.
- The young man was wrapped in linens, and in another act of tenderness and mercy, the incarnate Yahweh "gave" the resurrected young man back to his mother.
- Fear gripped everyone, and rightfully so! They gave glory to God by calling Jesus a "great prophet." Many of those who witnessed it would have been reminded of the following:
 - Elisha's resurrecting scene of the Shunammite son (2 Kgs. 4:18-37) some 800 years ago, as Shunem is less than 2 miles from Nain.
 - Elijah's resurrecting account of the widow's son (1 Kgs. 17:17-23), and in particular, "handing the son to the mother" (1 Kgs. 17:23).
- Jesus is greater, as He did not need to pray to God, stretch Himself on the dead body three times like Elijah (1 Kgs. 17:21-23), nor needed to place His mouth onto the mouth of the deceased, lying flat on the dead body, pacing back and forth twice like Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:33-35).
- God has visited His people, not just through a prophet. Jesus is God-incarnate.

4. The Snapshot of Salvation (v.17)

- The focus is on this widow: she was a widow, the crowd was with her, Jesus saw her, had compassion on her, spoke to her, and finally gave the dead man brought back to life to her. Jesus has come to free the captives and give joy to those mourning (4:18; 6:21).
- This miracle was done apart from any faith of anyone. Jesus was not invited to the funeral procession, did not ask anyone to do anything, nor was asked by anyone to do anything. This act, like the act of regeneration, is monergistic.
 - Just as Jesus inserts Himself into this grieving woman's life, He grants new spiritual life through His Spirit.
- News about this miracle spread abroad to Judea and the surrounding country. The resurrection of this young man is parabolic to his mother's life (as she gains her son back) and points forward to the resurrection where death has been defeated (1 Cor. 15: 55-57; Rev. 1:18).

Points of Application: