

The Miracles of Jesus

Miracle # 11

"Jesus Raises the Widow's Son"

Luke 7:11-17

"Joseph Bayly knew what the loss of a child was like. In fact, he and his wife Mary Lou lost three sons – one at eighteen days, after surgery; another at five years, with leukemia; the third at eighteen years, after a sledding accident. So when Joe Bayly wrote about the death of a child people listened. Here is a part of what he had to say: *Of all the deaths, that of a child is most unnatural and hardest to bear. In Carl Jung's words, 'it is the period placed before the end of the sentence,' sometimes when the sentence has hardly begun. We expect the old to die. The separation is always difficult, but it comes as no surprise. But (what of) the child, the youth? Life lies ahead, with its beauty, its wonder, its potential. Death is a cruel thief when it strikes down the young. The suffering that usually precedes death is another reason childhood death is so hard for parents to bear. Children were made for fun and laughter, for sunshine, not pain..... In a way that is different from any other relationship, a child is bone of his parent's bone, flesh of their flesh. When a child die, part of the parents is buried....I met a man who was in his seventies. During our first ten minutes together, he brought the faded photograph of a child out of his wallet – his child, who had died almost fifty years before.*" [As quoted by R. Kent Hughes. Luke: That You May Know the Truth. Vol. I, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998) p. 261]

"Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. (12) And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. (13) When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." (14) Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." (15) So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. (16) Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." (17) And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region."

The Background of the Miracle

(vv. 11-12) *"Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. (12) And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out..."*

Shortly after Jesus healed the Centurion's servant we find Jesus traveling toward the city of Nain accompanied by a large crowd. The name Nain means "**pleasant**" or "**delightful**." On this particular day it undoubtedly was still a very pleasant place, but its beauty was over-shadowed by something dark, gloomy and fearful – it was death.

As Jesus led his disciples and all those who were following them into the city of Nain they met a very different crowd. The crowd with Jesus was undoubtedly joyful, jubilant and expectant. Everything was upbeat. But the crowd heading out of town in the opposite direction had a very different frame of mind. The perspective of the other

crowd was gloomy and dark. They were mourning the death of a widow's only son. There is no joy, no hope, no expectancy. Jesus was headed for the city, while the mourners were headed for the cemetery. But in His wisdom He orchestrated "a meeting at the gate."

(v.12) "And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her."

This young man was already dead. This was actually the funeral procession taking him to his burial place. Death had already exercised its power over him. We are not told how he died or what caused his death. It could have been an accident or it could have been disease, but the sad truth is people of all ages die everyday. This is the place at which our hopes also die. When our loved one stops breathing and the heart stops pumping, we say, "**That's it, it is finished!**" As George Bernard Shaw wrote; "**The statistics of death are quite impressive – one of one people die.**"

Not only was this poor widow mourning the death of her only son but she now is all alone in a society that did not have provisions for the care of widows. A widow in those days was in a totally vulnerable position if there were no male relatives to protect and provide for her. This particular woman had already lost her husband and now her only son. This widow knows nothing of Jesus, her world is limited to a darkened sphere of grief. She doesn't approach Jesus with an eloquent plea, I suppose that she is too torn by sorrow to even pray.

Jesus has just come from healing the centurion's servant, but the situation here is far different. "In one scene, there is confident, clear thinking soldier; in the other, a vulnerable widow, drowning in her own turbulent emotions. In one, there is unquestioning faith – "Just say the word and my servant will be healed" (v. 7) in the other, grief as if there is not tomorrow. In one, there is eloquence and protocol; in the other, unbridled pain and enough tears to dissolve the strongest prayers.

These differences illustrate that our Savior doesn't demand that we fit into a set pattern to receive his help. He doesn't restrain His compassion because we fail to meet "our good deed quota." Or because we don't say the right words. Or because we forget to follow the correct ritual." [Charles Swindoll. The Continuation of Something Great. Luke 7:1-10:37. Bible Study Guide. (Anaheim, Calif.: Insights for Living, 1995) p. 4]

The Elements of the Miracle

He Had Compassion On Her (v. 13)

"When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

But when Jesus "saw her" he saw not only her grief but also the social stigma she would have to bear as well. Because you see according to the Jewish mind losing an only son was especially painful since it was often regarded as divine punishment for sin. How many times have you heard of someone who was suffering in grief, only to be told by a well-meaning but unwise person, "**God must be trying to tell you something!**"

How many times have people come to offer their sympathies? Saying to those that are grieving, "**God must of had a plan for this, so accept it.**" Or to hear another say, "**It was God's will and we must live by it.**" Or still another say, "**Somehow God planned this to test your faith!**" And still others who say, "**There is a silver lining in every cloud, you will find God's reason behind this eventually.**" Sometimes people say the cruelest and most heartless things trying to somehow explain the unexplainable.

Sometimes in our stumbling efforts to comfort others we only cause them greater **pain**. Often the most effective ministry that we can have for those who are grieving occurs in small acts of **service**, rather than in grand attempts to explain why a tragedy has occurred. Perhaps the most useful thing we can do is lend a listening ear and a compassionate shoulder.

As Jesus looked upon this woman he saw that all her hope was gone, a woman who not only was having to stand alone with Death, but also being judged by her own society and people. Jesus told her not to weep because he was about to turn her tears into a **testimony**.

Verse thirteen says that "**he had compassion on her**" in the original language this is one word (**esplanchnisthe**), and is the strongest possible word to use to express sympathy, pity and feeling. We have a Savior who pays attention to our tears. Sometimes when our heart has been broken we may wonder, "**Does anyone even care about me?**" The Bible says in Hebrews 4:15, "**For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses ...**" Jesus was and continues to be **moved** by the hurts and sorrows of his people.

Notice with me that all the initiative in this conversation was taken by the Lord; and then not in response to faith, but only in response to **grief** and human **need**.

"**Don't weep**" is easy to say if it is not happening in your life, or it not your son. We often tell others not to cry, essentially because it makes us **uncomfortable**. But Jesus told her not to weep because it was unnecessary and inappropriate.

He Touched the Coffin (vv. 14-15a)

Jesus then touched the coffin, bringing to a halt the funeral procession. Verse fourteen, "**Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still.**" Then with absolutely no ceremony Jesus simply instructed the boy to rise up, which is immediately evident by his sitting up and speaking. "**... And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."** He spoke to the corpse and said "**Young man, get up!**" It was the words a parent would speak to a child when it was time to get up in the morning. I can remember my Dad always said, "**Get up, son!**" When my Dad said; "**Get up, son!**" You knew it was not a suggestion, it was a command!

Verse fifteen says, "**So he who was dead sat up and began to speak...**" Luke says that the boy sat up and began to talk. What would you say if you awoke and found yourself bound and in a coffin?

The **silence** of Scripture as to what the young man, or for that matter Jairus' daughter or Lazarus, expressed as they "crossed the great divide" is thought provoking. It is instructive that although many in our day speak of what they witnessed as a result of their supposed "**Near Death Experience's**," as far as we know these biblical examples of individuals brought back from the dead did not lift the curtain on the after life.

He Gave Him Back To His Mother. (v. 15b)

Perhaps the most beautiful words of this miracle are found in verse fifteen where we read, "**... And He presented him to his mother.**"

Luke is the only Gospel writer to give us an account of this resurrection miracle. There are only two other such miracles reported in the Gospels – the daughter of Jairus (Mk. 5:22-43) and Lazarus, (John 11) the brother of Mary and Martha. The truth is strictly speaking these should not be called "resurrections" but rather "resuscitations."

They had physical life restored but they later **died** again. A resurrection is occurs when a person is raised to life never to die again and Jesus is the only one to accomplish this!

Without even the presence of **faith** Jesus gave this woman back her son. As one commentator on these verses said, "Perhaps he did this deliberately to teach us that someday even though we are not present on earth to exercise faith, He will make the grave yield it victims; our bodies will be raised again and claimed as we return from the skies in company with our wonderful Lord. The apostle Paul in his letter to church at Thessalonica wrote, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (18) Therefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. 4:16-18). What a meeting that will be!!! He will give our loved ones back to us and us to them, and forever we shall live together in His presence." [Ivor Powell Luke's Thrilling Gospel (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishing, 1965) p. 170]

God does honor faith, but He sometimes acts out of the pure **goodness** of his nature.

The Effect of the Miracle (vv.16—17)

" Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." (17) And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region."

This verse says that as a result of this miracle two things happened to the crowd.

First, it says that "great fear came upon them all" although I think it is better understood as "reverential awe" a brush with death does have a way of changing the way that we look at things. The story is told that, "Gen. William Nelson, a Union general in the Civil War, was consumed with the battles in Kentucky when a brawl ended up in his being shot, mortally, in the chest. He had faced many battles, but the fatal blow came while he was relaxing with his men. As such, he was caught fully unprepared. As men ran up the stairs to help him, the general had just one phrase, "Send for a clergyman; I wish to be baptized." He never had time as an adolescent or young man. He never had time as a private or after he became a general. And his wound did not stop or slow down the war. Everything around him was left virtually unchanged--except for the general's priorities. With only minutes left before he entered eternity, the one thing he cared about was preparing for eternity. He wanted to be baptized. Thirty minutes later he was dead." [as quoted in Christian Times, October 3, 1994, p. 26.]

May I suggest to you that a brush with death will cause us to reexamine our **priorities**. Perhaps in the past the death of someone you loved caused you at least momentarily to examine what you thought was important in life. It may be that you were able to shake it off as only a temporary morose thought. But the truth is at the end of your life the only thing that will truly matter is whether or not you settled the matter of where you are going to spend eternity. Then all the excuses you have offered will be exposed for what they are, excuses.

The Second thing that this miracle caused the people to do was come to the conclusion that "God has come to help his people." Yes he has! This miracle reminds us of our frailty and mortality, it also shouts to us of God's **power** over death and the grave. Death is not the end for those who know the Lord. Death is merely the transfer to eternity. No wonder the crowd was filled with awe. We should be too, as we contemplate

his creative power and his compassionate love. This one skirmish with death recorded here is not the end of the story; Jesus went on to defeat death for all time. The apostle John recorded Jesus as saying in Revelation 1:18, "I am he who lives and was dead and behold, I am alive forever more." Because death could not keep Jesus in the grave we can have the confidence that the apostle Paul expressed in 1 Cor. 15:54-57, "... then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?' The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I think that this illustration makes my point. "A Muslim in Africa became a Christian and some of his friends asked him why.

He answered: Well, it is like this: suppose you were going down a road and suddenly the road forked in two directions. And you didn't know which way to go. If you met two men at the fork – one dead and one alive – which one would you ask to show you the way?"

On another occasion Jesus was called to minister to two sisters named Mary and Martha upon the death of their brother Lazarus, what Jesus said to them is recorded in John 11:25-26. Turn in your Bibles there for a moment. Here we find that Jesus said, "...I am the resurrection and the life, He that believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. (26) And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die...." Following this statement Jesus asked her the single most important thing in life. Jesus said to Martha, "Do you believe this?" In other words, "**Martha do you believe that I am the resurrection and the life? Do you believe those that believe in me will never die?**" Her answer to Jesus was, "Yes, Lord, I believe...." The single most important question that you will ever answer in life is, "**Do you believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life? Do you believe that those who believe in Him will never die**" If so what have you done about it?

Application

Jesus is amazed by the centurion's faith (7:1-11) but He is also touched by the widows despairing sorrow. And in relation to ourselves we are *inspired* by the centurion's faith, but in truth we may **identify** more with the widow. You may even envy the centurion's faith, but certainly do not feel that our lives exhibit that kind of faith. Secretly we wonder if Jesus hears our prayers and notices our tears.

Perhaps you are like the widow, your heart has run out of hope? You don't just need a change of attitude. You need to connect or reconnect to the source of hope. Our Lord is not hindered nor limited by the things that render us hopeless, even when we can not see him or even feel his presence He is at work on our behalf. With Christ there is always hope.