

Sermon – 01/05/2011 am

Widow's Son Raised

Study Text: Luke 7:11-17

Have you been to a funeral lately? I am sure it was a sad occasion with some relatives or friends weeping. The weeping is because of separation. There is a profound reality and finality about death. Death is the end of life – life as we know it on this earth. It is the end of the road and at the end of the road you will meet God.

Imagine being at a funeral in which these realities are reversed. Imagine seeing the cold corpse sit up and begin to talk. What would you think of the man who said to the corpse 'Arise'! If you had been at a funeral in the town of Nain in Israel just 2000 years ago this is what you would have witnessed. The funeral would have been especially sad because the dead person was the only son of his mother and she was a widow. The man you saw speaking to the corpse saying 'Arise'! would have been Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus began his ministry in Galilee. He preached the kingdom of God and also healed the sick people and cast out demons. Luke has told us how he healed a leper and put a paralytic back on his feet. Jesus healed the centurion's servant who was about to die. What greater work could Jesus do to demonstrate his divinity, to demonstrate that the Spirit of Yahweh was upon him (4:18)?

Jesus would reveal his divine power and authority by raising a man from the dead. He would at the same time reveal his compassion for individual human beings. The widow's son is the first of three people we are told about whom Jesus raised from the dead, the others being Jairus's daughter and Mary's brother Lazarus.

1. Compassion

Jesus left the city of Capernaum and headed South-West into the hill country. It would have been a day's journey to the town of Nain just a few kilometres from Nazareth. A large crowd of disciples and others followed Jesus. The disciples went wherever Jesus went. Local followers probably joined the crowd.

As Jesus and his followers came towards the entrance to Nain he met another crowd coming out of the town. This crowd was led by a woman who was weeping. Behind her some men were carrying a coffin, which in New Testament times would have been a simple stretcher. Jesus quickly assessed the situation.

The woman was without a husband. She must have been a widow. There was no family with her. The deceased must have been her only child. It was in fact her only son. A large crowd came behind her. This was a terribly sad funeral with the parent burying their own child. It was terribly, terribly sad because this child was the only son of a widow.

A poor widow often came to our door in India. She was poor because without her husband she had no source of income. In the culture she had little opportunity to work. Most widows in India resort to begging. The plight of the widow in Israel would have been similar. The

widow Jesus met this day had just lost her beloved son as well as her only source of sustenance.

When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her (7:13). For the first time Luke calls Jesus ‘the Lord’. He has just told us of the authority and power that Jesus exercised over the sickness of the centurion’s servant. It was entirely appropriate to call him ‘Lord’ or ‘Master’ (John 13:13). ‘It has undoubted fitness in this scene in which Jesus will show himself to be Lord over death itself’.

The Lord Jesus saw this woman. He did not turn away or just walk past her. He noticed her. He looked and saw she was weeping. He had compassion for her. ‘When the Lord saw her his heart went out to her’ is how the New International Version translates this verse. The word ‘compassion’ literally means ‘to be moved in one’s bowels’; bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity. Compassion means to be deeply touched and moved in the heart. When Jesus saw Mary weeping at the grave of her brother he also wept.

Jesus understood and he felt the horror of death. He knew that death was not part of creation in the beginning – he was there. Death came because of sin. Death came because Satan succeeded in tempting Adam and Eve to disobey God. Death reminded Jesus of Satan and sin. It also reminded him of his mission.

The Father sent him into this world in order to die. Jesus would soon be hanging on the cross and his own mother would be weeping. Jesus knew it was his Father’s will for him to die because this was the only way he could conquer Satan and sin. He had to take the penalty for our sin in order for us to live. He would rise from the dead victorious over sin and death. We live with his promise of an eternal home where there is no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying (Revelation 21:4).

Jesus had compassion on this weeping widow. Do you understand how Jesus felt? Do you have compassion for those who mourn the loss of loved ones? Do you have compassion for those who weep because they are powerless in the face of death? Weep with those who weep we are told (Romans 12:15).

But we also give hope to those who weep without hope. You cannot raise a dead person as Jesus did but you can tell the lost that those who believe in Jesus Christ will not die but live. Jesus said *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me though he may die, he shall live* (John 11:25).

Robert came to my door the other day. He was doing a survey of some sort. He began to tell me about his life. He was divorced with one son. That son had recently died at just 20 years of age. As we talked I told him what I did. He said the usual things about meeting people of different religions and accepting everyone. But I offered him a copy of John’s gospel and he took it. I pray he reads the words that you have just heard, and that he understands them and believes in Jesus.

2. Power

Do not weep Jesus said to the widow. He was about to give her a good reason to stop weeping. He passed behind the widow and touched the open coffin (7:14). Those carrying it

stopped immediately. For Jews touching a dead body made them ceremonially unclean. It was highly unusual to do such a thing. But they would see something even more unusual.

Jesus did not speak to the pallbearers. He spoke to the dead man. Jesus said *young man, I say to you, Arise!* (7:14). How amazing! Some of those watching may have thought Jesus was crazy. There were lots of people watching him at this moment because he had stopped the funeral procession. What was going on? What was this stranger doing? What was he saying?

Jesus' disciples were also watching. They had seen Jesus heal many people and cast out demons. But now he was speaking to a dead man, a man being taken for burial, and saying to him 'Arise'! If the people did not hear directly they would have heard his words being whispered in the crowd.

'Arise' said Jesus, and the dead man *sat up and began to speak* (7:15). The man did not simply stir and have to race off to a life support machine. He sat up and started to talk. Could any greater evidence of life be given? We are not told what the young man said because it was not important. He was dead but was now alive, and all glory belonged to Jesus.

You can imagine today's press reporting on this incident. They would be asking this man what it was like to be dead. 'Did you see God or any angels?' They would be tragically ignorant of the almighty power of God by which this man was raised from the dead. It is tragic, is it not, when people today read this story and are unmoved. They remain ignorant of the power and authority of Jesus, of his power and authority over life and over death.

3. Glory

How did the crowd from Nain and the crowd with Jesus respond to this mighty work of Jesus? They were gripped with fear (7:16). They were filled with awe. They were in the presence of a great prophet they said. They would have heard about the prophet Elijah and how he raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17).

Leon Morris writes 'This is an inadequate view of Jesus, but it probably represents the highest title the townsmen could give anyone'. Jesus is a great prophet; but he is more than a prophet. Jesus raised this young man from the dead without prayer. He raised Jairus's daughter without prayer (8:54). He simply said 'Arise'. In his own power, the power of the Son of God, he raised the dead.

The people gave all the glory to God. They at least attributed the miracle to the right God – the true God. They said *God has visited his people* (7:16). What they said was perfectly true even if they did not fully understand what they were saying. Jesus truly was God visiting his people.

God so loved the lost that he sent his only begotten Son into the world. He gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this about Jesus? Do you believe in Jesus Christ, and believe that in him you have already passed from death to life?

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon