

GIVING LIFE TO THOSE WHO ARE DEAD

Luke 7: 11-17

Luke 7:11 ¶ Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him.

Nain: The city was located about 4 miles from Tabor and 25 miles southwest of Capernaum. This was the first miracle of raising the dead Jesus had done, and it stirred up awe and astonishment among the people.

Many Disciples and much people: There were likely four distinct classifications of those who followed Jesus: The Apostles who were the chosen disciples, others who were disciples but not in the inner circle of the twelve, curious people who just wanted to see what miracle would happen next and to be in on what was going on, and perhaps some skeptics who were seeking to discredit Jesus. This was the typical make-up of the crowds that we around where Jesus went. If you check out a typical church, how would we classify those who show up on Sunday morning? (Record responses on board.)

12 As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out— the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.

Gate: Cities were surrounded by walls, to defend them from their enemies. People entered through gates placed at convenient distances from each other. Every culture has its walls and gates for protection and passage. A gate is nothing more than a hole in the wall over which someone exercises control. What kind of walls and gates do we have in our culture? By and large, the walls are the “laws and ordinances” of the government. The gates are the exceptions written into the laws or interpreted by the courts. Just as illegitimate forces could sometimes break through walls of a city (or go over the walls) or come through the gate under false pretenses in ancient times; people today breach the security that laws are supposed to provide by the same means. They break through, go over or around the laws and obtain access by false pretenses. (Could do a similar exploration regarding walls and gates in our churches.)

Carried Out: In most cities it was not allowed to bury the dead within the walled area of the city. They were carried to some convenient burial-place in the vicinity of the city and away from the general population. There was limited space within the walls of the city and it was reserved for the living. Is there a spiritual truth for us today. Do we have “dead bodies” taking up room in our churches? These “bodies” could apply to people or to traditions. We hear a lot of talk about the “dead wood” in our church who are just occupying space. It is not the physical space that is the concern. Many times the “deadwood” require more attention than the living and divert resources that could be used to help the living. We don’t hear a lot about the dead traditions (that is, the traditions are no longer effective means of doing ministry) that have been or should have been buried. If they have been buried some will not leave them buried.

Also, there is a significant health issue of having decaying bodies

buried nearby when there is no way to seal the coffin. There is contamination of the air and the water supply. Is there a spiritual lesson here? Many of our churches are contaminated by philosophies and traditions and practices that have no eternal value. By concentrating on and hanging onto the non-essentials (perishable) philosophies, traditions, and practices, we stink up the place and maybe even cause people to become sick and die. The stirring up of controversy in a church over non-essentials can cause those who are seeking the Lord to become disgusted and leave without ever following through on finding the Lord and His salvation.

Only Son: This fact is mentioned to show the severity of the loss in this particular death. Not having a son to carry on the family name was serious in that society. The concept of immortality among some groups was (maybe still is) tied to having many descendants who would carry on the name and life of the progenitor. It is the idea that I will be living on through my grandson and his children and their children. (God has a different idea regarding eternal life.)

The idea of mourning for an only son is tied to the sacrifice of "God's only begotten Son." An Old Testament reference to this is found in Zech 12:10 "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for *his* only *son*, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for *his* firstborn." [Many (perhaps all) of the works of Jesus were tied to Messianic prophecies.]

Widow: Combine the previous loss (only son) with the fact that the mother was a widow and we multiply the tragedy by several fold. In that culture there were few social and economic safety nets not a lot of concern for the economic plight of other people. In addition to the loss of a loved one, this woman was in dire economic straits.

Large Crowd: The traditions of the people was to show compassion to others when there was a death in the family. We still do this as do most other cultures. We go to "pay our respects" by visiting the family of the deceased person and attending the funeral or memorial service. In addition, several people had to be involved to carry the coffin and if it was to be carried very far, extra people went to help. In the Jewish culture having many people around was helped by a canon they had "it was forbidden to do any work at the time a dead man was buried, even one of the common people."

Is there something more here than just compassion for the family? We used to (and some still do) show much respect for the dead. We have laws against the desecration of dead bodies. We pull over to the side of the road for funeral processions. Cemeteries are treated with reverence and most of us are appalled when some crosses the line of what is considered appropriate in regard these things. Such attitudes are not limited to Judeo-Christian cultures – it is almost universal. What is behind all this awe and

reverence? It may be that people realize that death is the intersection of the temporal and eternal. It is point at which all choices have been made and destinations are fixed. It is (in a very real sense) a point no return (the resurrection notwithstanding). It is one of those critical moments in our human existence. It is truly an awesome situation.

13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

The Lord saw her: When we have problems and stress and losses, we tend to wonder if God is aware of what is happening to us. Many of the Psalms showed that David had such questions when he was trouble. It should be reassuring to the children of God that God sees everything.

Compassion: Referring again to the Psalms, we read the question put to God: "Do you not care what is happening to me?" There was no doubt in this case regarding whether God cares. He had compassion on her. In a sense, the widow of Nain was representation of the nation because they lack hope and they were in mourning and without means to help themselves.

Said to her: Does God speak to people today? How? (Ask for input, list on board)

Comfort and assurance by the Holy Spirit
Passages from the Holy Scriptures
Word of encouragement from another person
Circumstances

Weep Not: When someone suffered a significant loss, there is sorrow and sorrow is accompanied by tears. It is a natural response. How many times have we, in trying to comfort someone, said to the person, "Now, now, don't cry." If a person is to NOT cry, then there needs to be a reason or the admonishment is empty words. We need to be prepared to help restore hope or to provide a different perspective or even replace that which was lost if we attempt to comfort with the words, "don't weep." Jesus was prepared to do just that.

How can we make application of the points in verse 13 to our lives and ministry today.

See - do we see the misery and the grief and the despair of people around us?

Compassion - seeing is only the beginning if we are to do the works of Jesus that He left for us to do. Compassion that is only a feeling in the heart that does not result in action to help is empty.

Said - God cannot use your word unless you speak them. We tend to just feel sorry for someone but we never tell them. We may feel appreciation for someone but we never tell them.

Weep not - There is a ministry of encouragement that each one of us can take part.

14 Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!"

Went: Most of us are waiting for people to come to us. We would like to re-write the Great Commission to read: "When all the world comes to you,

preach the Gospel . . ."

Touched: In order to touch something you have to get close. So many times we want to be involved in "long distance" ministry in that we want to keep everything and everyone at arm's length or even further away.

Admittedly, you can touch people by sending money and some do not even go that far. Just think how much difference a personal contact would make in the life of someone who is hurting.

Spoke: Our words have power in them. The old saying I learned as a child about "sticks and stone may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" is NOT true. Our words have the power to help or to hurt. Words can encourage or discourage. Words can heal or cut to the quick.

Get up: What is the expectation when God speaks to us. He would have us to "rise up from where we are." The ability for the young man to follow the command of Jesus depended on life coming back into his body. The same can be said for those who are lost and dead in their sinful condition. To "get up" from where they are requires life that only Jesus can give.

When we are speaking to people who are hurting and are suffering from "deadness" in their lives, do we point them to the necessity to "get up with new life?" Any other message is only a temporary fix and it does not solve the basic problem.

What Jesus did here was a demonstration of the truth stated in John 5:25 "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live."

15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

There was evidence of life in that there was action (movement) and there was communication. We could stretch a point and find some spiritual significance in the fact that those who are alive in Christ give evidence of that life by their actions and their conversation.

16 They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people."

I continue to be amazed that the Jews could see (and hear about) what Jesus did and they not be able to connect the dots and come to the right conclusion of Who He was. Some recognized Him as a great prophet - maybe like Elijah or Elisha. Others said that "God has come to visit (episkeptomia) his people." This the word from which we get the English word "oversee." It is likely that they did not mean that they recognized Jesus as God in the flesh but that he was a representation (or emissary) from God.

17 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country. People who had their lives impacted by the presence of Jesus talked about it and told others. The spiritual lesson for us today is all too obvious.