

INTRODUCTION

This past week I was at a faith evangelism training seminar and I met an interesting pastor from Kilgore, Texas. He had some pretty funny stories to relate from the ministry and could tell them with great skill. He told us about a 74-year-old man in his church who accepted Christ. He was a big man, weighing well over 200 pounds. One day, three of them, including this 74-year-old man, were working to clear off some property surrounding the church. It was a hot day, and the pastor said suddenly the 74-year-old man grabbed his chest and fell to his knees and then he tumbled over. They ran to try to help him, but it was apparent the man had suffered some kind of heart attack. He wasn't breathing and they couldn't get a heartbeat. Neither the pastor nor the other man knew CPR, but they tried to get him breathing again. No luck. Then they tried to pick him up and put him in the truck to rush him to the ER, but the man was so large they couldn't lift him. They finally dragged him over to the truck and made one final effort to try to lift him up onto the tailgate. In desperation, one grabbed his feet and the other his hands and they said, “One, two, three LIFT!” The pastor said the man was so heavy they dropped him. When he hit the dirt, they heard an “oof!” They looked down and color was returning to the man's face and soon he was breathing! He regained consciousness and they took him to the hospital. When they told the story to the ER doctor, he scratched his head and said, “I've never heard of that happening before, but I guess the jolt of being dropped could have shocked his heart into beating!” The pastor said that man lived for 10 more years but he never could get him back to help clear off that property!

In our text today, Jesus confronts a dead man—and He doesn't drop him. He touches the casket and tells him to sit up. Guess what happened? Let's read about it in Luke 7:10-17.

Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. 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. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don't cry.” Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, “young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. 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.” This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

The wonderful thing about preaching through the gospel of Luke is the topic of every single message is Jesus. I have been madly in love with Jesus since I was 17. Since then, I have wanted to always follow Him and to model my ministry after Him. So, when I was a very young pastor, I was called upon to conduct my first funeral. I had only attended one funeral in my entire life, my grandfather's when I was about 8 years old, so I really didn't know what to do or say. So, I found myself asking, “What would Jesus do? How would Jesus conduct a funeral?” When I took my Bible and studied Jesus' involvement in funerals, I made an amazing discovery: Jesus didn't conduct funerals—He broke them up! As far we know, Jesus only attended three funerals. He showed up at Lazarus' tomb four days after the funeral and said, “Lazarus, come forth!” (John 11:43) He showed up at Jairus' home just a few hours after his 12-year-old daughter died and Jesus said, “My child, get up.” And here, as well, Jesus breaks up another funeral.

By the way, these three miracles should not be called “resurrections.” Each person was “resuscitated.” They had physical life restored, but then they later died. A resurrection occurs when a person is raised never to die again. Jesus’ resurrection is a perfect example of this. His resurrection is called the “firstfruits” (1 Corinthians 15:23) because it is a picture of our future resurrection.

To me, this is one of the most beautiful miracles in scripture. I originally intended to combine this miracle with the miracle of the healing of the centurion’s servant in verses 1-10, because comparing the differences in these two miracles can teach us a great deal about Jesus. So, as we study this miracle, try to remember what we learned last week about the centurion who expressed amazing faith to Jesus. What can we learn from this wonderful miracle? First we see

I. THE MISERY OF HUMAN SUFFERING

There is a new genre of television called Reality TV. That very phrase is an oxymoron. How many people can act real when there is a TV camera pointed at them? On the other hand, I propose the Bible is real life. The Bible never tries to gloss over the truth about reality of suffering and pain. In the Bible you see the worst of people and the best of people. It is not some fairy tale where everyone is happy and healthy all the time. The pages of this book are filled with people who suffered—why? Because pain and suffering is a part of real life. As human beings

A. We know: The certainty of death

Try to imagine the scene Jesus walked into. There were two processions that day. One was Jesus’ entourage; the other was a funeral procession. The King of Life led one and the prince of darkness—death, led the other. One was on the way to the grave; the other was on the way to glory. These two processions were about to collide.

Nain was a small village whose name means “pleasant” or “lovely.” But there was nothing pleasant about the town that day because a teenage boy had died. It seems natural for an elderly man or woman to pass away, but there is something unsettling about the death of a child or teenager.

Jesus meets this mournful funeral procession as He approaches the village. Women crying out in shrill voices expressing sorrow led it. Following the women would be four to six men carrying a wicker container in which the corpse was placed. According to Jewish burial customs, when a person died, their body was carefully and lovingly washed. It was wrapped in long strips of cloth saturated in aloe and spices to mask the odor of decay. The body remained in the home for several hours, but was buried within 24 hours because the bodies were not embalmed.

All of us are familiar with death—we can’t escape it. As someone has said, “The only thing certain in life is death and taxes.” That’s not exactly true, because some people don’t pay taxes. Death is much more certain than taxes. George Bernard Shaw wrote: “The statistics of death are quite impressive—one out of one people die.”

In his book, *The Last Thing We Talk About*, Joseph Bayly writes:

“There are two fixed points in our lives: birth and death. Death is especially unbending. This frustrates us because we think in this time of scientific breakthrough, when we can break out of earth’s atmosphere and fly into space that we should also be able to break death’s cold grip on us. But death is changeless. We may postpone it, we may tame its violence, but death is still there waiting for us. The door of the hearse is never closed. Dairy farmer and sales executive live in death’s shadow, with Nobel Prize winner and prostitute, mother, infant, teen, and old man. The hearse stands waiting for the surgeon who transplants the heart as well as the hopeful recipient, for the funeral director as well as the corpse he prepares. Death spares none.

The Bible confirms this in Hebrews 9:27: “For it is appointed unto man once to die; and after this the judgement.” Every funeral procession you pass, every cemetery you drive by and every obituary page you turn is a constant reminder: You and I have an appointment with death. But death is not the end. The Bible says there is judgement waiting for each of us.

I’ve told you before about the gravestone that had this warning placed on it:

*Consider young man as you pass by
as you are now so once was I
as I am now you soon will be
so prepare, young man to follow me*

That sounded pretty good, but someone added a couple of lines so it read:

*To follow you is not my intent
Until I know which way you went!*

We may fear our own death, but we really can’t grieve over it after it happens. Instead, the pain of death touches us when someone we loves is dying or has died. That’s another example of human misery and suffering. We see that reflected in the heart-broken mother of this young man. Like her,

B. We know: Tears of sorrow

Not only was there a dead person, there was a grieving mother. You could recognize her because she was wearing the burlap garment and had covered her head and face with ashes. You could see the tracks of her tears as they washed down her ash-stained cheeks. Verse 12 tells us the dead person was “the only son of his mother.” That’s bad enough, but then we read, “and she was a widow.” The word Jesus uses is “young man” which can mean a teenager. So we can learn this poor woman had not only suffered the death of her husband, but she was left with only one child, and now he was dead—so she was probably a young widow. She made this same trip to the cemetery before. What a sad picture of loneliness and despair! Her heart had been crushed when her husband died but at least she had hope, she had a son. He could be her provider, her protection, her companion, but now he had died, too! She felt as if she had no hope. Remember,

she lived in a man's world, and women had very few legal rights. Her son inherited the legal rights of his father but now he was dead. Here is a woman with a broken heart—and broken hopes. Her spirit had been crushed under the load of pain. Tears are her only language.

We live in a world of broken hearts and broken hopes. Just as death is a part of life so are tears. Sorrow and suffering are just part of the fallen human experience. I don't know *how* long you are going to live but I can assure you your years will be full of pain and sorrow. The Psalmist writes: "The length of our days is seventy years—or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." (Psalm 90:10) Whether you live to be 60, 70, or 100 years old, your life will be full of trouble and sorrow.

Tears are a part of our existence. Studies show women cry five times more than men and 85% of that time crying made them feel better. The most common reason for crying is sadness, followed by happiness, anger, sympathy, anxiety and fear.

What are tears? A chemist will tell you they are a liquid solution comprised of sodium chloride, calcium and other chemicals. The Ophthalmologists will tell you tears are the lubricating fluid the body secretes to keep the eyeballs from drying out. Yet others will tell you tears are a sign of weakness and cowardice. But we know tears are actually the concentrated extract of sorrow pouring from a heart that is breaking open.

If you could take all the tears people have cried over the centuries, you could fill an ocean. To love someone is to risk having your heart broken. F.B. Meyer writes:

Tears are valuable. They are God-given relief mechanisms. We have no sympathy with morbid sentimentality, but we may well question whether the man who cannot weep can really love; for sorrow is love, widowed and bereaved—and where that is present, its most natural expression is in tears. Jesus wept. Peter wept. The Ephesian pastors wept on the neck of the Apostle whose face they were never to see again. Jesus stands beside each mourner saying, "weep my child, for I, too have wept." Tears relieve the burning brain, as a shower removes summer heat. Tears express the agony of the heart, as an overflow lessens the pressure of the flood against the dam. Tears are the material out of which heaven paints its brightest rainbow." (F.B. Meyer, Abraham).

Some people would want to live the kind of life free from all pain and sorrow, but that's just not possible. Actually, times of sorrow are valuable times of learning for us. One of my favorite poems says, "I walked a mile with laughter she chatted all the way, but I was none the wiser for all she had to say; I walked a mile with sorrow and not a word said she; But, oh, the things I learned when sorrow walked with me!" In his essay, "The Problem of Pain," C. S. Lewis wrote, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Are you passing through a tough, painful, difficult time right now? Can you relate to the tears and despair of this young widow? Congratulations! You are exactly in a position where Jesus can come and make a difference in your life. Now, I'd like for us to consider:

II. THE MEANING OF JESUS’ RESPONSE

One reason I love this story is we learn something very important about the character and personality of Jesus.

A. He is: Deeply moved by our sorrow

As far as we know, Jesus didn’t know this young widow but when He saw her broken heart, verse 13 tells us “his heart went out to her and he said, ‘Don’t cry.’” Here’s what we can learn about Jesus: He sees you in your pain and is moved by your tears. That phrase “his heart went out” is one word in the original text. It is the strongest word possible in the Greek language to express sympathy, pity and feeling. Although her voice didn’t speak to Jesus, her tears communicated a powerful message to Jesus and He responded to her need. That’s why I entitled this message “God is Touched by Our Tears.” We have a Savior who pays attention to our tears. Sometimes when your heart has been broken and you find yourself weeping uncontrollably, you may wonder, “Does anyone even *care* about me?” The river of tears you have cried has been noticed and recorded by our compassionate Heavenly Father. I love this verse from Psalm 56:8, “Record my lament; put my tears in your wineskin—are they not in your record?” The KJV says, “You have saved my tears in your bottle.” Whether it was a bottle or a wineskin, the amazing thing is that our tears are so precious to God He records our weeping, and He treasures our tears.

Now, I need to stop and give you a quick history lesson about what a revolutionary concept of God this was and is. During the days Jesus came to earth, one of the most prominent religious beliefs was called Stoicism (founded by Zeno 300 years before Christ). The Stoics (mentioned in Acts 17:18) believed the gods were totally immune to emotions. Since Fate already determined all things, the gods were apathetic or had “no feeling.” The Greeks told the story of the young man who stole a fox and hid it under his tunic while talking nonchalantly with the owner. When the owner left, the young man fell over dead. While he had been calmly talking, the fox had eaten out his flesh. The Stoics admired his refusal to demonstrate any pain or emotion. Jesus showed us God is not some uninterested, implacable Stoic deity. We see a picture of God who is full of compassion and is moved by our sorrows.

The shortest verse in the Bible is also one of the most powerful. John 11:35 only has two words, “Jesus wept.” It’s a short statement but it teaches us volumes about Jesus. At the sight of the burial of his friend, Lazarus, Jesus cried. Why? Because Lazarus was dead? No, because Jesus knew in a few moments Lazarus would walk out of the grave. Why did He cry? Because the sisters of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, were crying. Their pain touched him and it became His pain. And Jesus wept. What does that mean to us? When our hearts are broken and wounded, Jesus sees us, He is moved by our sorrow, and in a way, He comes to weep with us. He is able to do more than just weep with us, however,

B. He is: Anxious to remove our sorrows

He said to the grieving mother, “Stop crying.” It’s wonderful to have a compassionate Savior who feels our pain and is moved by our sorrow. But it’s even better to have a Savior who wants to remove our sorrows. Jesus is the expert on dealing with sorrow. In Isaiah 53:3-4 we read, “He

was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering ... Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.”

When you are crying an ocean of tears, Jesus whispers to you, “Don’t cry.” When you are carrying a load of suffering and sorrow, Jesus says, “Would you like some help carrying that?” The Bible says He is a man of sorrows, familiar with grief—He is the expert. If we let Him, He will pick up and carry our load of sorrow.

In New York City, near Rockefeller Center, a sculpture of the Greek mythological god, Atlas, holds the world on his back. It’s obvious he is in pain under this tremendous load. Walk just a few steps across the street and you can enter St. Patrick’s Cathedral where you can see a statue of Jesus smiling and holding a globe effortlessly in His palm. Some people are like Atlas, they feel like they are carrying the weight of the world upon their shoulders. When, as the song says, “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.” My friend, He is able to carry your sorrows!

Let’s see what Jesus did for those people in Nain, because He can do the same for us today.

III. THE MIRACLE OF JESUS’ POWER—HE CAN RESTORE:

A. Life where there is deadness

Jesus saw the crying mother, and His heart went out to her. He did an amazing thing for a good Jewish rabbi. He walked up and performed CPR: Christ’s Power Released! He touched the casket. If a Jew touched a dead body or even a casket, they were immediately rendered unclean. But we have already seen Jesus is One who touches the “untouchables.” He spoke to the corpse. “Young man, get up!” It was the words a parent would speak to a child when it was time to wake up in the morning. “Young man, get up!” Can you imagine the wonder in the crowd when the teenager sat up from the casket? Luke tells us the boy sat up and began to talk. What did he say? We don’t know. I can imagine he said, “Somebody get these stinking cloths off me!” Or perhaps he said, “Put me down!” When he realized what was happening, he might have said, “Mom, you need a refund from these professional mourners.” I can also imagine after they took the cloths off his eyes he looked at Jesus and said, “Thank you, Jesus.”

Here’s the point for us today. If you are reading these words, you aren’t physically dead, but you may be dead in other ways. You could be spiritually dead, and Jesus says, “Get up!” Some of you, like the prodigal son are wallowing in the mud of sin and disobedience. Jesus says, “Young men, get up!”

There is perhaps a teenager here today and God has been calling you to surrender your life to serve Him full time. He is saying to you today, “Young woman, get up!” “Young man, get up!”

Jesus can speak life into a dead body. He can speak life into a dead marriage, a dead job, a dead personality. “Get up!” But there was another miracle there that day.

B. Jesus can restore: Relationships that are broken

He not only overcame the grip of death, Jesus repaired a relationship severed by death. To me, the most beautiful words of this miracle are found in verse 15 when we read, "Jesus gave him back to his mother." Can't you just see Jesus as he helps the young man out of the casket and leads him back through the crowd? People are crowding around to touch this young man. But finally they press through the crowd and there sits a mother, a young widow. She is staring at her son with amazement. Just moments before, all her hopes were crushed and ruined. Now, she has her boy back! Oh, the joy that must have flooded her soul!! Look at her ash covered face; do you see her eyes shining brightly? Can't you see her as she embraces her son? I think she was still crying but her tears of grief had been changed into tears of joy! Then, I can just see her looking into the compassionate eyes of Jesus, wondering, "Who can this man be?" Then she rushes into His arms and He enfolds her in His gentle embrace. I can almost hear His soothing words, can't you? "There now, everything is going to be all right." That's exactly what Jesus wants to do to for you today, embrace you with His grace and say as He promises in Isaiah 61:3, "I want to bestow on you're a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise for the spirit of despair."

Throughout my ministry, I've seen Jesus do the same thing. I've seen Jesus give a wayward rebellious son or daughter back to his or her parents. I've seen Jesus take a sorry, alcoholic husband, clean him up and present him back to his wife and children. I've see Jesus take a wayward wife and give her back to her family. Jesus is the business of healing broken relationships. Do you need that today?

CONCLUSION

Need a miracle, but you don't have amazing faith like the centurion? Don't despair! Jesus acted out of His love and grace—not in response to the faith of the mother or son! But can you imagine their faith after this miracle of grace?

Why do these two miracles appear together? I believe God put them together so we could compare them. Do you recall what the Jewish elders said about the centurion? They said, "Jesus, this is a good man. He loves our nation. He has built our synagogue. He deserves your miracle. Even though the centurion himself said, "I don't deserve your presence or power." Most of the people who heard about that miracle would have agreed with the Jewish elders. Can't you hear the gossip? "Did you hear about he centurion's servant? Jesus healed him." "Yeah, the centurion deserves everything good that may come his way. He is a good man."

But compare that to this miracle. Neither the dead son nor the grieving mother even approached Jesus. As far as we know, they never met Jesus before this day. Nobody prayed and asked Jesus to raise the son. As far as we know there wasn't any faith involved in this miracle!

Are you confused yet? Good. Most of us have a real hard time exercising the amazing faith of the centurion. Although I desire to live that way, I fall short so many times. Do you? After studying the miracle last week, you might have thought, "Amazing faith? I sure would like to have it, but I don't. I guess I'm just left out. It's hopeless for me to receive the benefits of God's power."

Cheer up. I've got some good news for you. Whereas God does honor faith, He sometimes simply acts out of the pure nature of His goodness. In other words, Jesus wasn't responding to faith in this miracle, He was responding to the pain and sorrow of a heartbroken mother. Let that sink in for a moment.

May I put it another way? **Jesus is amazed by amazing faith, but He is also touched by agonizing sorrow.**

Do you recall the beautiful words about prayer found in Romans 8:23? Sometimes we are hurting so deeply all we can do is "groan inwardly." At that time the Holy Spirit intercedes for us "with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit." (Romans 8:26)

Jesus was amazed at the centurion's faith and responded in love and power. Why? Because that's the nature of the Lord of Glory. On the next day, Jesus searched into the broken heart of a grief-stricken mother and the only sounds He heard were terrible groans of agony. Her pain moved Jesus, so He responded in love and power. Why? Because that's the nature of the Man of Sorrows.

For sure, whatever your need today, Jesus stands ready to meet it. Sorrows come in life. Tears *will* flow, but remember, *God is touched by our tears.*

In 1873, Chicago lawyer Horatio Spafford was advised by his doctor to take a European vacation to improve his and his wife's health. He sent his wife and four daughters ahead by ship; he was going to join them a few weeks later. On November 22, 1873, their ship collided with another in the icy Atlantic and sank within moments. All four daughters drowned and only Mrs. Spafford survived. She was rescued and taken to Cardiff, Wales. From there she telegraphed her husband that she alone had survived. Horatio Spafford immediately boarded a ship to join his heartbroken wife. Can you imagine the tears they both cried? Near the spot where his daughters were drowned, a broken-hearted father took a pen and paper and wrote these brave words:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
when sorrows like sea billows roll;
whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
it is well, it is well with my soul.
The next verse says:
Though Satan should buffet;
though trials should come;
let this blest assurance control;
that Christ has regarded my helpless estate;
and has shed His own blood for my soul!

There is a man who had the healing power of Jesus flowing through his broken heart. Pain was there, sorrow was there like sea waves, but there was something else there, too. There was the peach of God that passes all understanding.

A man recently told me he sat at the bedside of his dying mother. She was a great woman of God and they began to talk about wonderful memories. Tears began to creep down her cheeks and her son took his hand and wiped her tears away. His mother smiled and said, "You know, Son? The next hand that wipes away my tears will have nail prints in them." She was right because we read in Revelation 21:4, "And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

He can do it now, just as He will do it then, because we serve a God who is touched by our tears.

OUTLINE

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Record my lament; put my tears in your wineskin—are they not in your record? *Psalms 56:8*

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He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering ... Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, ... *Isaiah 53:3-4*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes