

Mercy & Might

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[0 : 00] about how Jesus healed the centurion's servant without even entering his house from a distance.!

And last Sunday we talked about how the centurion may have come to this conclusion.

That Jesus has authority over sickness and over the body and over life. We talked about how the centurion likely saw it in the way that Jesus healed and cast out demons.

And we looked at several instances of how Jesus did these sorts of things by simply commanding the sickness to leave. Or the body of the person to be healed.

Or the demon to come out. And it happened. Well next in his gospel Luke wants to tell us of yet another example of Jesus' authority to heal.

[1 : 18] And this is by far one of the greatest miracles that Jesus ever performed. And Luke is the only one of the gospel writers who includes this in his account of what happened with Jesus.

Let's pick up the story here in Luke chapter 7 verse 11. Soon afterward Jesus went to a town called Nain.

And his disciples and a large crowd went 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. So Luke sets the scene for us.

This took place soon after the healing of the centurion servant. Still early on in Jesus' ministry. And it all happened in a town called Nain. This is actually the only time we even hear about this town in the Bible.

[2 : 18] A small village on a hillside in Galilee. And Luke tells us that Jesus' disciples and a large crowd went along with Jesus.

And they approach the town gate at the very same moment as a funeral procession is taking place. Luke says a dead person was being carried out.

And who is this dead person? Luke says he was the only son of his mother. And she was a widow.

And a large crowd from the town was with her. So picture this. There's Jesus and this large crowd. They're coming to this town. And then there's this funeral procession.

And a large crowd with this woman. Going out of the town. And let's just reflect for a moment on Luke's description of this deceased person and his mother.

[3 : 20] Before we find out what happens. Luke says he was the only son of his mother. And she was a widow. What does that tell us about this whole situation?

Well it tells us that the woman grieving at the center of this funeral has already lost her husband. And now she has just lost her son.

Who we will discover momentarily is a young man. Death comes to us all eventually. But it's especially heartbreaking and tragic when a young person dies.

Back in this time and culture most of us know that the men in the family were the primary breadwinners. Women relied on their husbands and children on their fathers for the basics of life.

And so to lose a husband left wives and children in a difficult spot. In this case the widow had already lost her husband.

[4 : 24] And likely was relying on her son to provide for her. And now with her only son tragically dead. There would be the question of how she would carry on.

But the more I thought about this. I'm almost certain that finances and her own welfare were probably nothing compared to the grief and the anguish of having lost her only boy.

That precious relationship. I don't know what it's like to go through that myself. But many of us have seen the tears and the anguish and the devastation of another who has lost a child.

And it's something that even years later is still felt and grieved. It's exceedingly sad and painful. This is the widow's reality.

And her townspeople have rallied around her on this day to grieve with her. Maybe to those of you who are young here who have never been to a funeral.

[5 : 35] When someone dies what often happens is people gather together to grieve and to cry. And to remember the life of the person who has died. And then after that they often all go together to take the body of the person who has died out to the place where they will be buried.

It's called a funeral procession. Here in Davidson today a person's body is put into a coffin usually. And then the coffin is loaded into the back of a long car called a hearse.

And then everybody gets in their cars and drives out in a big procession to the Davidson Cemetery just outside of town where the body is then lowered into the ground and covered over with dirt.

Back in these days the Jews did a similar thing. Only there were no coffins and no cars. The body was put onto what's called a beer.

And I'm sorry I don't have a picture. But it was just like a frame that they would carry. Kind of like EMS would. It had handles all around it so that the men could carry it. And all the people at the funeral would walk together out of town with men carrying the body on the beer to a cave or a tomb in the hillside.

[6 : 51] And then they would lay the body in the cave or the tomb and close it up. So what happens is Jesus and the crowd with him meets the widow and the crowd with her at the entrance to this village.

Verse 13. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her. And he said, don't cry. Jesus was very deeply moved in this moment.

He was filled with compassion. His heart went out to her. And it wasn't just that there was a death. Notice where the compassion is focused.

When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her. The widow. And what's she doing in this moment?

She's crying. Literally. Weeping. Seeing her weeping over the loss of her son, Jesus is filled with compassion.

[8 : 01] And his heart goes out to her. He is grieved with her and for her. And he says, don't cry. Or more literally, weep not.

Then he went up and touched the beer they were carrying him on. And the bearers 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. This is utterly astonishing and wonderful. Jesus halts the funeral by putting his hand on the beer.

And then he speaks to the dead body and tells the young man to get up. And he does. Can you imagine the shock on everyone's faces?

[9 : 06] Both of the crowd with Jesus and of the people in the funeral. I mean, think about this. Doing anything like this, like Jesus did at first, would be the height of disrespect on an occasion like this.

Halting the procession and then speaking to the body of the dead man as if he was alive and telling him to get up. Like, does this man really have the audacity to do something so disrespectful?

But then all of a sudden, the boy's life returns to him. And he sits up on the beer in front of everyone. It worked.

I imagine that gasps and murmurs just spread like fire through the whole crowd in that moment. The man sits up and begins to talk. And Jesus gives him back to his mother.

Those words struck me. Of course, it was an amazing gift to the man to have a second chance to be alive again. There's no doubt about that.

[10 : 21] But this miracle began with Jesus seeing the grief of the widow and his heart going out to her. And it ends with Jesus giving the man back to his mother.

This miracle was for her. This was a gift of grace to her. Well, we don't have to guess or imagine the crowd's response.

Luke actually tells us what it was in the next verses. He says, 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. This translation on screen says they were filled with awe.

Probably most others, I think, say that fear gripped them all or fear seized them all. And probably we do well to keep the sense of both fear and awe. There were probably some who felt a deep alarm, real fright, seeing this young man sit up in the middle of his own funeral procession.

[11 : 33] I mean, this is the last thing anyone expected in this moment. This never happens. Once people die, by the time the funeral comes around, it's 100% certain that they're dead.

People have handled the body, doing the customs for burial. If you've ever been to a funeral and seen the lifeless body of a person, wouldn't you feel frightened if all of a sudden their eyes opened and they sat up right in front of you?

But then beneath that, I think there's another kind of fear. A deeper fear. Not so much over just the shock of seeing this, but over the next realization. A person was just resurrected from the dead.

And who has the power to do that? Only God. And so there was probably a deeper kind of fear.

A sense that the great, all-powerful creator and author of life himself has visited us in this moment. Has been near us.

[12 : 42] And where do I stand with him? The word awe, I think, is helpful too. Because it seems that the reaction of those who were seized with fear was not all dread and worry.

Look at the things that they say. They say, a great prophet has appeared among us. God has come to help his people. To help his people.

Some translations say visit. That's right. But it's almost always in the sense of a visit to help. Or to care for. And so they were in awe. Not just because something really unexpected happened.

It says they praised and glorified God. Because they recognized that this was his doing. Well, what should we make of all this?

Why is this here? What should we conclude from this? Because of course, several things come to my mind. First, Jesus was not some emotionally detached moral teacher.

[13 : 51] Who, like the Pharisees, cared more about people living right from wrong than anything else. This miracle was born out of compassion for a woman who was weeping and had just lost what felt like everything in a terrible tragedy.

Jesus saw her in her grief and was grieved with her. And did this for her. I know some of you are going through some really hard things right now in your lives.

Even things that you have shed tears over. Do you know that Jesus sees you in the midst of your grief?

In the midst of your sorrow and struggle? Do you know that his heart goes out to you? He is not distant and detached from the sorrow and from the struggle in our lives.

We have a compassionate Lord. And it doesn't mean that he will always simply undo the tragedy or take away the struggle in a moment.

[15 : 10] Like he did here. At times we will continue to wonder why. But do you know that even in the midst of it all he sees you.

And he cares for you. And what you are going through. He feels the grief with you. Next.

There is something special. In why this miracle at this time and in this place. What do the people conclude from this? We see it in their words.

A great prophet has appeared among us. God has come to help his people. Why do they come to that conclusion? Well, there has only ever been three people in history prior to this that they know of and that we know of.

Who were dead and came back to life like this. All three of them had a connection to two of the greatest prophets in Israel's history.

[16 : 17] The first was the resurrection of a widow's son. In the town of Zarephath. And the prophet that God did that through was Elijah. You can read about that in 1 Kings 17.

The second was the resurrection of the Shunammite widow. Sorry, the Shunammite woman's son in the town of Shunam. And the prophet God did that through was Elisha.

Elijah's successor. You can read about that in 2 Kings chapter 4. And then there was that third random Israelite whose dead body was hastily thrown into the tomb of the prophet Elijah.

And upon touching his bones, he was resurrected. God has a sense of humor, I think, with that third one. You can read about that in 2 Kings 13. But the point is this.

Resurrecting someone from the dead is arguably the greatest demonstration of God's power in human history. I mean, we could debate about whether creation out of nothing or something else is slightly greater.

[17 : 17] But among things witnessed by us which are unquestionably impossible for us to do, raising someone from the dead is pretty well the top of the list. Only the author of life itself can do it.

And up until this moment in history here in Luke 7, he has only done it three times that we know of. And all three in connection to a great prophet.

Those resurrection miracles back in the days of Elijah and Elisha served to authenticate the prophets. To confirm that, yes, they really were sent by God.

And they really did speak on God's behalf. And so what does it mean then that now, here in the first century, a man named Jesus comes along and raises a widow's son from the dead?

What more do we know about that Shunammite son who was raised from the dead 900 years before this? We're not going to go back and read it all in 2 Kings chapter 4.

[18 : 27] If you want to do that later, you can. But interestingly, there's many similarities. The Shunammite son was her only son. And a very dear and precious son to her because her husband was very old and she had not been able to conceive.

And her child was a miracle baby. The Shunammite son, 900 years before this, also died tragically while he was still young, while he was working out in the field.

And the prophet Elisha came and he prayed to the Lord, to Yahweh. He came and offered this prayer and the boy was raised to life.

And it even mentions that the prophet gave the son back to his mother. There's some wild parallels here. And oh, by the way, where was the town of Shunamm where this happened 900 years earlier?

Turns out that both Shunamm and Nain are on the same hill in Israel, only a mile and a half apart from each other. What's the significance of all these similarities?

[19 : 40] God is very deliberately doing the same kind of resurrection miracle in the same place 900 years later for a reason. And it's to show that this man, Jesus, is his chosen prophet.

And that Jesus does speak on his behalf. And therefore, we should listen to Jesus. God's trying to get their attention here in Nain.

And our attention too. As we talked about last Sunday, these things Jesus is doing, these miracles, are signs. And we see the people here beginning to understand what they're pointing to.

They're coming closer to the right conclusion. Jesus is a great prophet of God. That's true. But even more than that, Jesus is even more than that, is what all of the signs taken together reveal.

Third, we should notice, as with the miracles before, just how Jesus did this. Unlike Elisha and Elijah, who prayed to God and God answered, Jesus simply speaks to the young man's body and commands him to get back up.

[21 : 04] And he does. There's a contrast here, I think. Jesus possesses an authority as he does this that Elijah and Elisha never had.

God's making a contrast here with Jesus. It's different. Jesus himself does as God does. He commands and by his word, the man is brought back to life.

Just for a second, let's think about how that worked. Which part of the young man's dead body on the bier heard the voice of Jesus? What good are the ears if a person is dead?

How can the brain interpret the sound with no blood flow to it because the heart has stopped? How can a dead man's body obey Jesus' command?

even in a spiritual sense or a metaphysical sense, we can't even begin to wrap our minds around how Jesus did this. It's like in that moment, Jesus saying that, breathe the breath of life back into his body.

[22 : 21] And in an instant, his very soul was returned to his body from wherever it had been. His wounds were healed, the damage, any damage healed, any decay undone, any rot that was happening, all remedied in an instant.

And every cell in his body set back into perfect motion. We can't even fathom how God can do such a thing by simply speaking.

This miracle is on a whole different level to what Elijah and Elisha did long ago. This man, Jesus, speaks with the same authority as God himself.

By his words, life is given where there was none. Jesus was more than just a man. He was God.

The divine son of God. The people are on the right track, concluding he was a prophet, but this sign points to Jesus being much more than that.

[23 : 28] Listen to these words of Jesus on another occasion. Some of my favorite from John chapter 5. Jesus says this, For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.

Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.

Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Jesus continues, he says, Very truly, I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and will not be judged, but has crossed over from death to life.

Very truly, I tell you, 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.

Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out. Those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned.

[24 : 53] Those are the words of Jesus. Have you ever heard anybody else say anything like that? To many, those words might seem like just words, just grandiose boasts until they see what Jesus did for the widow's son in Nain.

Jesus really does have the authority and power to reunite our souls with our bodies and raise us back to life from the dead.

He did it. And this is just the first time. He will do it again for Jairus' daughter. He will do it again for Lazarus. And he can do it again as he promised for you and for me.

Listen to what Jesus said. He said, John 6, verse 40, For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

Listen to these words of Jesus also. Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life, the one who believes in me will live even though they die.

[26 : 11] Do you believe these words of Jesus? Right now, Jesus is seated on His heavenly throne at the right hand of God and He has all authority in heaven and on earth.

We don't often think of this or even feel it, but everything in the universe which He created is being sustained right now by His powerful word.

Hebrews 1, verse 3. Jesus is God. If you have come to acknowledge that and embrace that, what can be more important than to listen to what He has said and obey Him?

And, what greater comfort can there be in this dark world than that the one who had compassion on the grieving widow is our Lord and King over all?

It's been a dark week in our world. News of Charlie Kirk's public murder has traveled the world over and it's left behind a very large funeral procession.

[27 : 32] Left behind our two children who have to go through the rest of their lives without their dad and their mother, now a widow.

Jesus sees them and His heart goes out to them too. And there will be a day coming when Charlie, because of his faith in Jesus, will hear the voice of Jesus calling him to arise, to get up.

And He will and we will never to die again. What happened there in Nain is just a foreshadowing.

It's just a taste. It's just a sample of what Jesus can do by His powerful Word. Of what Jesus will do for all who believe in His name.

Do you believe this? Let's pray. Father in Heaven, we thank You for this account which shouts to us that there is hope in this world, in this dark world where we die.

[28 : 56] And that hope is You, Jesus. We declare it, we proclaim it, we thank You that You have come, that You have lived, that You have died, that You rose again, that You're coming back, and that we will rise with You according to Your promise and according to Your powerful Word.

Thanks be to God. To Your name be the glory. Amen.