

The Dead Raised

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Preacher: Colin Dow

[0 : 0 0] even if they should choose not to believe in his miraculous power, few would deny that Jesus of Nazareth is the most attractive figure in all history.

His humanity, compassion, empathy, and wisdom stand him head and shoulders above anyone who has ever lived or will ever live. But if we take the gospel accounts seriously as historical records, which we should, accepting as truth, both those things which we can understand and those things we cannot understand, we must not only say that Jesus is the most attractive figure in history, but that he's also the most powerful. For who else can make a layman walk? Who else can turn water into wine? And as we shall see today, who else can raise the dead to life? If we take the gospel accounts seriously, then Jesus Christ is both the most attractive and the most powerful man in all of history. Well, it's all very well to say these things, but what does Jesus have to do with us? Surely, Jesus belongs to the past, not to the present. He may be the most attractive and powerful man in all history, but we live 2,000 years after the events in this gospel took place, of what relevance is Jesus to us in 21st century Glasgow. Again, if we take the gospel seriously, which we must, the Jesus who lived 2,000 years ago in Palestine, though he was crucified, rose from the grave and is more alive than he's ever been. Jesus, therefore, remains today the most attractive and powerful human, still reaching out to the uncaste and the grieving, still carefully charting the courses of our lives and raising the dead to new life in him. The Jesus who raised the son of the widow of Nain in Luke chapter 7 is still at work in us and for us, comforting us when tragedy strikes, powerfully breathing into our lives new vigor, a new life in him. Today's passage displays both Jesus' attractiveness and power.

This is the Jesus who invites us today to believe and trust in him, not a Jesus who intimidates us, but who invites us, not a Jesus who runs away from our suffering, but who runs toward us in our pain, because he himself has stood where we stand today. Let's consider two things from our passage.

First, Jesus confronted by human tragedy, and second, Jesus triumphant over human tragedy. Jesus confronted by human tragedy, Jesus triumphant over human tragedy. First of all, Jesus confronted by human tragedy. In Luke 7, 11 through 12, Jesus is confronted by what is the most human of scenes, something with which we've all been confronted, the tragedy of human death. We can't get away from it because it's all around us. The shroud of darkness is never very far away. Whether it's a hearse we see being driven down the road, when we walk past a graveyard on our way to work, or we watch murder mysteries on telly, death is never present in our society. Some of the young folk among us may never have been to a funeral. Some of the older folk may feel they're never far away from funerals, but young or old, this is the most tragic, but also the most human of all experiences.

[4 : 2 0] The question we ask is this, where is Jesus in our grief? Where is Jesus when tragedy strikes?

He may seem very far away, but the truth is that whether we're aware of it or not, he's never closer to us than when we're grieving. This is the greatest human tragedy, the tragedy of human death. There are three aspects of this tragedy I want to draw your attention to from this passage. The tragedy of separation, the tragedy of powerlessness, and the tragedy of tears.

Are there those among us who are grieving today aware of it or not? Jesus is never closer to us than he is right now. First of all, the tragedy of separation. The tragedy of separation. It's impossible for most of us to place ourselves in this widow's shoes. She's a widow, which means she'd already lost her husband. We're told that she's now lost her only son. To lose your husband is one thing. To lose your only son is a tragedy more painful again. This is the son into whom she poured her entire life, all her energy, all her hopes and dreams, and now she's lost him. In that shroud, on that

bear, isn't just the lifeless body of her son. Her life is there also.

[6 : 01] She may still be breathing, but she died the moment he died. What's been buried that day isn't just a young man, but also an old woman. Now, we may economize this and say, well, she's gone and lost the only source of her income, but in the last analysis, whatever culture we belong to, the loss of one's only child is the most painful experience possible. A mother may carry a child for nine months in her womb and be connected to him by her umbilical cord, but for the rest of her life, she is connected to him by a cord altogether more powerful, the cord of love. And that love willingly drains her life away into this child into whom she pours all her life, all her time, all her dreams, all her energy, all her hope.

But for this widow here, it's all gone. It's been tragically taken from her, and now that her boy is gone, she's got nothing left to live for. It's that pain of separation you see. That widow was physically joined to her son for nine months in the womb, but now he's gone and she'll never see him again.

She's poured her life into him. He was all she had, and now he's gone. She will never again see the face that made her feel loved. She'll never hear that voice that gave her life purpose. She'll never feel that touch that brought her such joy. It's all so very tragic, is it not? And that's ultimately why we grieve at funerals, not just for the person who's died, but for the family left behind who alone know what it meant to live with and be loved by that person. This is the tragedy with which Jesus has been confronted that day and then, which He meets every time a human being dies.

Secondly, there's the tragedy of powerlessness, powerlessness. As father to four wonderful children, I recognize that there's a connection between mother and child that goes beyond anything I can understand.

They share her DNA. They grew in her for nine months, and for years afterwards, she fed them and met every need they had. As I said earlier, the umbilical cord is merely a symbol of that connection. Sometimes twins are born who are conjoined. Every child born of a woman is conjoined at the heart, with her. And for as long as they live, that connection's never severed. The widow of Nain gave life to her child. As he grew in her womb, she nourished him. In his young years, she fed him with her own milk. And as he grew up, she met his every need. She was everything he needed, and she was able to meet all these needs. But when it came to her son's illness and to his death, she was helpless and powerless to do anything other than hold his hand to watch and then to grieve.

[9 : 31] No matter how earnestly she pleaded with him to get better, he only grew worse. And then as his breathing changed into that death rattle, she wished that he would fight. But ultimately, it was to no avail.

That's the thing about human death, isn't it? We're so powerless before it. From the least to the greatest, the most we can do is to hold our loved one's hand to watch and then to grieve.

When my own father was dying, I was so frustrated by my own powerlessness. We see the greatest of men, the most powerful of men, and they're helpless before their own mortality or the mortality of their loved ones. John Buchan once asked the question, what is the glory of man when it all ends in six feet of dirt? We may send rockets to orbit Mars, but before death, we're powerless. It's so tragically painful. And Jesus, who comes close to us in our grief, knows it only too well.

Well, then thirdly here, there's the tragedy of tears. The tragedy of tears. The history of mankind is the history of pain. You know, there's no record of tears in the Garden of Eden.

There are no tears in the Garden of Eden. The first mention of the kind of pain that produces tears comes after the entrance of sin into human experience in Genesis 4. Mankind was not created to cry.

[11 : 13] We were not created with tear ducts. But then we weren't created to die either. And both belonged together. From Luke 7, 13, we learn that the grieving widow was weeping. What else can we do when death strikes other than weep? And the keener the pain, the more we weep. This mother cried, just like, a mother I know from the north, from the next village to my own. She recently lost her son to a fishing boat, which sunk and took him down to the bottom of the North Sea with it. Took him down to the bottom of the North Sea with it. For the first weeks, first few weeks after, all she could do was cry.

She couldn't speak. She just wept and wept and wept. Middle Eastern funerals are far noisier than ours. People are less inhibited about crying loudly.

What Jesus encountered that day as he entered the city of Nain was the high decibel grief, not just of a mother, but of an entire crowd. The sights were tragic. The sounds were tragic.

Everything so tragic. There wasn't one redeeming feature of the whole occasion. There can't be because there's nothing left to redeem. Even the memories we have of our loved ones will one day fade and die, just as we surely also one day will fade and die.

So where is Jesus then when this tragedy strikes? Where is he when we feel so very alone, so very powerless, and when our hearts are breaking? He's not far away. In fact, to use the words of verse 12, he draws near at times like these. The Greek word behind the word drew near in verse 12 is that from which we get the English word engage, engage. That's where Jesus is in our grief and tragedy, engaging with us. He does not. He will not. He cannot abandon us. He engages with us. [13:38] The invisible hand on our shoulder, the unheard voice in our ear, the unfelt comfort in our heart. Jesus confronted by human tragedy. But then second, Jesus triumphant over human tragedy.

Jesus triumphant over human tragedy. This widow, having lost her son, didn't know and perhaps didn't care that Jesus was there. She was altogether overwhelmed with her own grief, and yet with what compassion and grace Jesus engaged with her when she needed him the most.

He was not asked, not expected to be at the funeral of her son, but he was there nonetheless. It was there at a young man's funeral. All these grieving people encountered him first, and it was an encounter they would never forget. This episode begins with the tragedy of human grief. It ends with the triumph of Jesus' glory, and it's Jesus who makes all the difference. Tragedy turns to triumph, a mother's tears dry on Jesus' shoulders.

There's three brief elements of Jesus' triumph over human tragedy I want us to explore. First, the triumph of compassion. Then the triumph of word.

[14:59] Then the triumph of resurrection. First of all, the triumph of compassion. The triumph of compassion. We must be very careful when approaching texts in the Gospels not to abstract from them spiritual principles at the expense of the human context in which we find them.

The compassion of Jesus is a spiritual principle we may read about in a book, but it was expressed in a real-life situation where a broken mother was slowly walking behind her son's body.

This is where the compassion of Jesus is most keenly defined, not in a theological textbook, but in the reality of human tragedy, pain, and grief.

We read, And when the Lord saw her, verse 13, He had compassion on her.

I love the way in which the New International Version translates this. It says, His heart went out to her. He was so deeply moved, and the movement of his heart was inside out.

[16:13] His heart went out to her. We may say to someone, My heart goes out to you, but seldom know what we mean when we say that. Nor can we allow our hearts to go out to everyone in pain, lest we've got no heart left within us.

Jesus saw. And Jesus had compassion. It was that compassion which prompted and performed what is perhaps the greatest miracle in human history.

The compassion of Christ. His heart moving toward human suffering. That's what draws him to this widow. Sometimes another person's suffering causes us to recoil away from them because we want to protect ourselves.

And sometimes that's just what we need to do because we cannot carry the weight of this world's pain on our own shoulders. But the Jesus of whom we read in the Gospels never once recoiled from another person's suffering.

The movement is always toward. When he sees us in our grief. He has compassion upon us.

[17:24] And the movement of his heart is inside out. He sees this widow and he knows what it means for her to lose her only son. He sees her tears.

He hears her cries of grief. And his heart goes out to her. Wouldn't you just love to have been there? To see the expression on her face?

To see what perfect compassion looks like? And sounds like. The great leaders of our day may be marked by their lack of compassion.

But this is what sets Jesus of Nazareth apart from them all. How great his compassion upon every one of us. It's that compassion which is the great driving force behind the use of his power.

A power he unleashes not to consolidate his authority over others. But a power he unleashes to comfort the grieving. To strengthen the weak and to save the lost.

[18:22] This is the triumph of compassion. Not as a moral virtue. But as a person. Jesus of Nazareth. Now if we're looking for people to have compassion upon us today.

We may find it in an extent in them. But we'll only find it limitless. And infinitely expressed. In Jesus. Second we have the triumph of word. The triumph of word. In his gospel. Luke records historical events. His intended audience is the early church. The early church is on a mission footing. It's taking the good news of Jesus far and wide. And through its proclamation of the gospel. Thousands are coming to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. Experiencing for themselves. Spiritual resurrection to new life in him. And in this passage. [19 : 24] Luke is reinforcing the means. By which the risen and exalted Christ. Unleashes his power. And sinners are savingly transformed. In verses 13 and 14.

Jesus speaks. He speaks. In the first instance. He says to the grieving mother. Do not weep. In the second instance. He comes up and touches the beard. Upon which the boy's body is being carried. And he says. Young man I say to you arise. Young man I say to you arise. The means by which. The powerful and compassionate Christ. Unleashes his power to raise. This young man from the dead. Is the power. Of his word. He spoke. And this young man lived. And this widow's tears were dried. He spoke. He spoke. And the Holy Spirit gave new life to this boy. [20 : 26] It's the word of Jesus. Which is the means by which. Our Lord works powerfully. To bring life from the dead. Later on. He did much the same thing. With Lazarus. Where standing before the grave of his friend. He commanded him saying. Lazarus come forth. How seemingly absurd. That a man. Standing in front of a dead body. Should speak. And that body should live. Those of us who have experienced for ourselves. The appearance of death. Know how absurd. Such a proposition is. Better to weep than to speak. Surely. What difference. Do words have. To a dead man. Who cannot hear them. And yet. By the power of his word. Jesus unleashed a power. That no one could ever measure. This is the means. [21 : 22] By which. The risen. And exalted. Jesus works today. It is. As his word is proclaimed. To human beings. Spiritually dead. In sin and trespass. That he works life. In their hearts. This is the message. For the early church. As they proclaim. The word of Christ. As they faithfully preach. The good news of Jesus. The Holy Spirit. Miraculously works. In the minds and hearts. Of the spiritually dead. And they come to life. Luke seen this in action. For himself. All that happens is. That the word is preached. And dead men live. We must. Never. Lose our confidence. In the proclamation. Of the word of Jesus. It might seem. Entirely as absurd. As it did in Jesus day. For him to speak. Over the body. Of the dead man. [22 : 17] But it has not lost. One ounce. Of its power. To bring the spiritually dead. To life. Through faith in him. Wonders. Bring no one to life. But the word of Jesus. Can and does. Sacraments. And strategies. Bring no one to life. But the speech of Jesus. Can and does. Here's our connection. To the incalculable power. Of Christ. Even something as foolish. As the preaching. Of the word of God. And then third. And lastly. The triumph of resurrection. The triumph of resurrection. You know. Ultimately. This story will be remembered. Because having touched the beard. Upon which the young man's body. Was being carried. And having said. I say to you young man. Arise. [23 : 13] We read that this young man. Sat up. Began to speak. For those of us. Who have witnessed death. At first hand. And many of us here have. Such a thing. Is unthinkable. What power in the words of Jesus. That. That dead should rise. In this gospel. We've learned that Jesus. Exercises demons. He heals all manner of human sickness. But now we learn something. Of an altogether greater. An incomprehensible order. He raises the dead. This is the first resurrection miracle. Recorded in the gospel. The raising to new life. Of an unnamed boy. In a remote Jewish town. Long ago. Now we may be skeptical.

[24 : 13] Of this miracle. And doubt that Jesus. Ever did such an extraordinary thing. But if we doubt. The works of Christ. As recorded. By Luke.

What's to stop us. Doubting the words of Christ. As recorded by Luke. And what do we have left of Jesus. If we have neither his works. Nor his words. Know that Jesus.

In whom we believe. By the power of his word. And word alone. Raised a young man. From the dead. Is this not a Jesus. Worth trusting and believing.

Not a Jesus. Who destroys life. But a Jesus. Who gives life. Not a Jesus. Who wields his power. Through the death. Of his followers. In war. But a Jesus.

Who wields power. Through the giving. Of life. To his followers. In word. This is what makes him. So attractive. And why today. He calls.

[25 : 13] Invites. And commands. All of us here. To trust in him. But this. Resurrection. Recorded in Luke 7. Surely.

Is only a prelude. To the greatest. Of all resurrections. This young man. Raised by Jesus. From the dead. Perhaps. As a very old man. Died again.

A man who died. Twice. But the day is coming. When Jesus. Shall be put to death. On the cross. But on the third day.

He shall be raised to life. By the mighty word of God. Never to die again. But rather. Seated at the right hand of God. To give life. To anyone.

Who will put their faith. And trust in him. He still raises the dead. To new life. And one day. When we all here. Go the way of all flesh.

[26 : 13] When we physically die. From the youngest. To the oldest. He shall raise. Our bodies. To new life. The glory of which.

At present. We cannot even begin. To comprehend. As we close. As I want to briefly.

Connect these two points together. Jesus confronted. By human tragedy. And Jesus triumphant. Over human tragedy. I want us all to listen. Very carefully. To this conclusion.

Please. All of us. In verse 15. We read these remarkable words. And Jesus. Gave him to his mother. The scripture. At this point.

Is silent. Because. Human words. Aren't capable. Of describing the joy. Which must have filled. This woman's heart. Imagine. It. With me. Picture it.

[27 : 09] In your mind. The expression. In her face. She was joined. At the heart. To him. And his funeral. Was her funeral. Jesus didn't only.

Raise that. Boy. To new life. That day. He raised her. To new life. As well. Now let me apply this. And this is where. I want you all. To listen. So carefully. Let me apply this.

To any young people here. Who are not yet Christians. And do not follow. In the faith of their parents. You are not yet a Christian. And so in the language of the Bible.

You are still dead in sin. Can you imagine the pain. That brings to your parents. Your mother especially. To whom you are joined.

At the heart. Imagine the joy. Imagine the joy. Of your mother today. If you should. Put your faith in Jesus. And experience.

[28 : 09] New life in him. Imagine. And then by trusting. In the most attractive. And powerful figure. In all human history. Make that joy.

A reality. For her. Let us pray. Father God.

We're amazed. That such a. Attractive. And powerful Jesus. Should be so interested. In us. As individuals. And yet he is.

Many of us. Most of us. Have experienced. The new life. That Jesus brings. And yet there are still some. Who they may.

Who they may walk. And breathe. Yet they're as dead. As this young man was. Especially. And Lord. We ask. And earnestly pray. To you today. We plead with you.

[29 : 09] Will Jesus. Not speak. The words. Over them. That he spoke. Over that young man. Two thousand years ago. Young man. I say to you. Arise. Will you not break.

Into their hearts. And give them. Faith in you. That they may too live. In Jesus name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.