

Raising of a Dead Boy

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 7th of July 2002. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled Raising of a Dead Boy and is based on Luke chapter 7. No more, no less. That's who Jesus was. Didn't come back to life. Didn't do any miracles. Think about those questions tonight. Why don't I pray for us that we may hear what God's word has to say to us.

Let's pray. Father, we do indeed thank you that you have let yourself known to us through your son. Father, we do pray as we read and learn from your word that we may understand more clearly who Jesus is and what impact he should have in our life.

We pray this in your son's name. Amen. I love TV ads. They're great. Some of them are absolutely fantastic. One of my favourite ones at the moment, I don't know if you've seen it, is there's this guy on his mountain bike and he's just charging across the Sahara.

[1 : 15] You're going along and there's a cheetah right beside him and then going along and he's going just as fast as the cheetah that he leaps off his mountain bike, grabs hold of the cheetah and he's wrestling it to the ground. You know, they're having this great big rumble and then all of a sudden he holds the cheetah's jaw open, pulls out a can of Pepsi Max, opens it up, drinks it down and then you see the sign, Pepsi Max, live life to the max.

It's a great ad. Just fantastic. But there's a TV ad that's just worrying me a little at the moment. I don't know if you've seen it, it's Lapine Funerals.

I've never seen a funeral advertisement on television, particularly not in Sydney, but obviously it's a bigger thing down here in Melbourne. But I was sitting there and I was a little disturbed by it.

Here was a funeral ad helping people to think about planning for the future. You know, make sure you have your funeral arrangements all organised. I felt this was just a little, you know, just a little uneasy about this.

I think I felt uneasy because I just thought, well, it reminds us that there is this great shadow that goes over all of us. The shadow of death.

[2 : 33] There's a certain reality there that we don't like to think about. That death comes to us all. This great big shadow at any moment could fall upon us.

We don't actually think about death much, I don't think. It's only when we come face to face to death to actually stop and think about it. I came face to face with death this week.

I did a funeral of a little baby. She was only one month old. She was born at 25 weeks, lived a month and then died.

Christopher was his name. He was very tiny. And for the sake of those that were there, they actually had the coffin open so that people could have their one last glimpse at Christopher.

So I got to see little Christopher. Cold and lifeless. His life over before it had really all, before it already started really.

[3 : 49] It's only when we come face to face with death that we stop and think about it. I took the funeral this week of Christopher. He was the only child of these parents.

It was very hard for them and for the family that were there. I found it incredibly moving. Particularly when we went out to the burial site and we buried the little coffin inside the grave.

It just didn't seem right. It just didn't seem right. Tonight we're going to look at when Jesus comes face to face with death so we can learn more about who Jesus is.

For that's Luke's purpose in this story that we have. You might like to open your Bibles. Luke chapter 7 verse 11 through to 17.

Luke sets up the scene for us. Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain and his disciples and a large crowd went with him.

[5 : 01] As he approached the gate of the town a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son and she was a widow and with her was a large crowd from the town.

In these two verses the scene has been set. We find out that it's soon after, sometime after, Jesus healing the centurion's servant which we looked at last week.

We looked at how the centurion had faith that Jesus could heal his servant. Well, sometime after that we see that Jesus goes into the town of Nain.

Now, just to help give you a little bit of a clearer picture where Nain is, if you have Israel there, Galilee is up the top and this is the area which Jesus, as I said last week, has been doing most of his ministry.

It's centred around Galilee. And there's a lake there called the Lake of Galilee. Well, last week the centurion was from Capernaum which is at the top of the lake. Well, Nazareth is just down to the north east of it and to the south west is where Nain is.

[6 : 10] Still in Galilee, still in the heart of the territory where Jesus was doing his ministry. And the picture is, as we have Jesus walking to this town, he's got his large crowd with him and his disciples and they come walking into this town and they meet a funeral.

A funeral procession coming out the other way, out of the city gates. For back then, funerals were quite different. Back then, the funeral procession would go outside the city and go out, somewhere outside the city to bury their dead.

He probably only died sometime that day for it was a very warm climate and it was a part of the process that you would actually make sure that they were buried before the day was over.

That usually they didn't have the body overnight in the house. They would wrap the body up in some cloth. They would close the person's eyes and open their mouth.

They wouldn't be put into a coffin but they would be laid on a plank and carried out for all to see. It would have been a very sad, sad sight.

[7 : 21] Every time I now see a funeral procession in cars, I just feel the great weight of it. I feel the great sadness.

Well, Jesus would have seen this sadness but it was a greater sadness than what first appears. For we find out the man that has died was the only son of his mother and that she was in fact a widow. She is left without any support whatsoever. She has no social status in this country at this time. She is absolutely poor. Her husband's gone. Her only son is gone. What a miserable day for this widow.

A miserable, miserable day. And into the midst of this great sadness, Jesus steps in.

[8 : 31] In verse 13, When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, Do not weep. Then he came forward and touched the beard and the bearer stood still and he said, Young man, I say to you, rise.

In these two verses, we see Jesus take the initiative. We see Jesus full of compassion for this widow and he takes three actions.

The first action is he goes up to her and says, Do not weep. Don't weep anymore. Now, in our society, in our culture, this is not the type of advice that you would give people anymore.

I mean, to go up to someone and say, Look, stop crying. Just stop crying. No need to. I mean, in our society, we're told to encourage, let your emotions flow out.

You know, grieve. You need to grieve properly. Here Jesus says, Stop weeping. The words actually remind us of a couple of sermons about a month ago where Jesus is on the sermon on the plains.

[9 : 43] In chapter 6, if you look just on the other side over there, chapter 6, verse 21, Jesus, when speaking about the kingdom, says, Blessed are you who weep now for you will laugh.

The great message of salvation brings about laughter, brings about happiness. Jesus offers more than just words about don't weep.

We see the second action that Jesus does. He approaches the bear. The bear is this plank that I was talking about. It's the plank in which the body is laid upon, wrapped up in cloth.

And he comes up and he touches it. Now this is an extraordinary act in itself. For a part of the culture, you were not to touch the coffin, not to touch the dead person or the plank in which it was on.

It made you unclean. Yet Jesus steps up and touches it for the purposes of stopping it, to stop the procession right there and then. The third action that Jesus takes is he addresses the dead man.

[10:56] This is kind of extraordinary, isn't it? Can you imagine saying these words at a funeral? Young man, I say to you, rise. Extraordinary words to say to a person who is dead.

Quite tragic, you know, it's just not right. But for someone who is empowered by God, someone who has the authority over death, these words are great words.

Jesus confronts death and he speaks to the young man. Notice the two-fold response in verse 15. The dead man sat up and began to speak and Jesus gave him to his mother.

The two responses there, the dead man sat up. What a contrast, a dead man sitting up. Dead people don't normally move. But here Jesus, after speaking to this boy, this man, sits up.

Note the other response to Jesus' words. He begins to talk, indicating that he is truly alive. Well, at the end of the verse there, we see that Jesus gives her son back to him, back to the woman.

[12:27] We see that in verse 12 and at the end of verse 15, that it starts and finishes with the woman. You see, the passage here is not necessarily about the dead person who is dead and been raised to life.

It's about the woman. It's about her. She was someone who was crushed, lost all support. She was the poor. She is the one that needed healing and Jesus steps into her life and gives her son life. And as the son has life, so she is given life also. Notice, the account here is, at its heart, it's not about a healing.

At its heart, it's about Jesus. It's a disclosure of who Jesus is and what he has come to do. We see in this passage that Jesus has great power.

power. He has great authority and he yields it with great ease. He has the power over death. He nullifies its effects.

[13:43] I don't know if you like watching some of the superhero movies. There's a new one out, Spider-Man. One of the ones I used to enjoy were the Batman series. I remember a particular episode where the riddler says to Batman, riddle me this, riddle me that.

what is something that Bat cannot do? He was talking about the fact that Batman could not bring back someone to life. Here is someone that has brought someone back to life.

He has authority over death. He has authority and power to nullify its effects. He is indeed the great king.

But notice also in verse 13, what else do we learn about Jesus? He is also a person of great compassion. Jesus is compassionate for the widow, for the poor.

If you remember right back in chapter 4, chapter 4 verse 18, Jesus gave his statement about what he came to do. And he gave that statement in the words of Isaiah.

[14:54] Let me read them for you. The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. Here we see Jesus bringing good news to the poor.

He is someone that has compassion on the poor, to provide relief for the poor. He is a saviour. He has come to save.

The third thing to notice about Jesus is that the words of the author himself, he picks up these two things in verse 13 when he says, when the Lord saw her.

The author gives Jesus the title Lord. And isn't that right in what we see here? He is indeed Lord. But it's a title that we don't see usually until after Jesus' death and resurrection.

But here Luke uses it to help point out that this story is about Jesus, about who he is. Who is he? He is the Lord, the great king who has authority over death, the person who has come to save the world.

[16:13] We'll notice in verse 16 and 17 the response of the crowd. Let me read it for you, verse 16. Fear seized all of them and they glorified God saying a great prophet has risen among us and God looked favourably on his people.

This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country. The crowd are seized with fear. Can you imagine being there and seeing this happen?

Fear seized them. It brings this idea of awe and respect of Jesus. Isn't that right attitude that we should have towards him? One of fear, of awe and respect, acknowledging him for who he is.

But they also acknowledge God. They glorify God. And they say two things. The first thing they say is, a great prophet has risen among us.

A great prophet. prophet. The crowd recognise that Jesus is a great prophet. Is he just a great prophet or is he more? You see, the miracle that Jesus performs here brings to the crowd memories of their Old Testament history, of Elijah and Elisha.

[17 : 35] For both Elijah and Elisha brought children back from the dead. In 1 Kings chapter 17 we see Elijah raising a widow's son from illness. The illness has caused the death of the son.

But Elijah brings him back to life again. Elijah raises the Shunammite son. Both these accounts in the Old Testament are very similar to Jesus.

This account here of Jesus raising the widow's son. Yet there are differences. Elijah, when he was raising the widow's son, pleads with God in prayer.

But notice here in today's passage, Jesus speaks directly to the son. He doesn't pray to God, he speaks directly.

Elijah stretched himself out over the boy three times. He