

Laughing at Death

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 15th of September 2002. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled Laughing at Death and is based on Luke chapter 8 verses 40 to 56. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the great privilege to come here tonight to listen to your word. Father, we pray that you give us open ears and hearts to your word. Father, that you remind us of the great truths that in you there is life. We pray this in your son's name. Amen. Who can forget the morning of September 11th last year?

I remember it very clearly. My wife had turned the television on to flick through the channels to find something for our children to watch. But there was nothing.

[1 : 04] Just these panels of people talking. She tried flicking a little bit more, trying to find a channel that's something for our children to watch. But there was all these panels. And she realised that something big had happened.

She watched a little bit more intently. And she found out that the world tower had been crashed into by these hijackers.

She came rushing into me to tell me. I sat there all morning in my pyjamas, transfixed to the television. I couldn't believe it.

What about you? I guess you must have pictures in your mind of all that happened. I guess one of the things that, when I think back of that, that it reminds me of, reminds me of the fact that the shadow of death hangs over us all.

None of us is secure. Not even America. Great America. It's not secure. The shadow of death hangs over all of us.

[2 : 11] I remember being very little as a child, laying in bed, having lots of nightmares. I had many nightmares. We grew up in the country. But I had nightmares of sharks. They just seemed so terrifying.

I mean, for a little country boy who had just had yabbies in the dam, these sharks were ferocious looking things. I remember having dreams about all sorts of different things. Nightmares. I remember the only secure place was in my mum and dad's bed, tucked up nice and close to them. I think I may have even been up there to nearly high school, I think. Much to my embarrassment. But I guess I had a very, back then I thought that the shadow of death hung over all of us. And I was very aware of it as a child. But I think as we grow up, we become very blasé to it. I think September 11 brings it back home. Well, today we're going to be looking at when Jesus confronts death.

How does Jesus deal with this shadow of death that overhangs the first century Palestine that he was in? How does that impact on us today?

[3 : 18] Well, the story starts, if you open up your Bibles to Luke chapter 8 verse 40, page 841, if you want to follow along, which is a good thing to do.

Page 841. We see this is the third miracle story in a row about Jesus. Last week, we saw how Jesus calmed the storm.

That was the first miracle story. Here we see Jesus having authority over nature. Now we've missed one of the stories, which is verses 26 to 39. And this is the story of the demoniac, the person who is consumed by many, many demons.

And we see there Jesus having authority over Satan, over demons. And tonight we see how Jesus has authority over death and disease.

So let's have a look at it in verse 40. Verse 40 sets up the scene. We see that Jesus has been on the other side of the lake where he's performed this great miracle, the man who had the demoniac.

[4 : 29] And he's come back to the other side. And as he's got back to the other side of the lake, there's a great crowd there ready to welcome him. They're so excited that he's back. It's great. They've been waiting for him, watching for him.

Now as we go through tonight, make sure you keep an eye on this crowd. Here they are really enthusiastic to have Jesus back. But watch them as they go through. Watch the background. They're in the background there. It's like a bit of a background canvas. But they play an important part as we go through. So keep an eye as we work through the story. At the moment they're all positive. They're all really excited to see Jesus there.

And out of the crowd steps a man, Jairus. And we see this in verse 41 and 42. Just then there was a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue.

He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house. For he had an only daughter, about 12 years old, who was dying. I have two girls, a one-year-old and a three-year-old.

[5 : 34] And I love them dearly. They are so precious to me. I can just imagine. Here is this synagogue leader. And he has his only daughter, 12 years old.

And he's so concerned for her. My daughter got her fingers, my one-year-old, little Georgie, got her fingers jammed in the door. And I thought it was so serious, I quickly rushed out the door, not even thinking about what I was doing, to go and try and find our nearest doctor, which lived across the road.

She'd only just moved there the other day. Thanks, Michelle. But she wasn't there. I was so worried. What if her finger was going to fall off? Here is Jairus, Jairus, whose 12-year-old daughter is close to death.

He is so concerned about her. And rightly so. For he lives in an era, in an age, where the shadow of death is something that hangs over very heavily.

The average age of people back then was 20 to 25 years old. That is brought about basically by a very high mortality rate.

[6 : 43] Did you know that only 50% of children live to 10 years old? 50% of children only reach their 10th birthday. The shadow of death would have been very real to these people.

It would have been all around them in first century empire. Jesus decides to go, we see. But as he heads out, he encounters a delay.

And the drama begins. Look there in verse 40, in the next paragraph. Here is a woman.

She has a condition. She has been having a period for 12 years. This is a very serious condition back then.

She was like the living dead. For her, she was continuously unclean. When people looked at her, she was unclean.

[8 : 00] It meant that she could not interact with the people around her. She was not to touch anyone because she was unclean according to the laws set down in the Old Testament. Because she was unclean because she was bleeding.

If she touched someone, she made them unclean. She had to live apart from her society. This is such a debilitating thing for her.

In fact, her prospects of being integrated back into society are absolutely nil. For she's gone and spent all her money going to doctors, trying to cure this problem that she has.

And so she lives a life. A living dead life. Someone who's cut off from society for 12 years.

The same length of time that the little girl was alive. Well, verse 44, we see that she reaches out to Jesus. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes.

[9 : 05] And immediately her hemorrhage stopped. Here we see her coming up behind Jesus. And reaching out beyond what was socially accepted behaviour. She was not meant to touch another person.

Yet she was in the crowd. And she comes closer and closer to Jesus and touches him. Socially unacceptable. But she knows that if she can just touch him.

If she can just reach out and touch the edge of his garment. Such is her faith. She knows that she will be healed. And so she reaches out and touches him. Well, Jesus knows what has happened.

And so he says, who touched me? Everyone stops and denies it. Then we see there in verse 45, Peter says, Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.

Peter's saying, look, they're all around you. Someone's just come up and touched you. Don't worry about it, Jesus. Look, let's just keep on going. But Jesus is intent on exposing this woman.

[10:13] It's important for him to do that. As we'll see in a moment. So Jesus says, Someone touched me. For I noticed the power had gone out from me.

Jesus insists that he finds out who touched him. It's not that he doesn't know. We're seeing throughout Luke and throughout the Gospels that Jesus has a great understanding, a prophetic understanding of what's going on around him.

But Jesus does it for a reason. You can just imagine her tension. Jesus insisting. The crowd has stopped. They're all looking around. Who's touched Jesus? Jesus.

You can imagine the woman standing there. What am I going to do? Do I? I don't know. She was unclean. But it's healed now.

What should she do? And all of a sudden she blurts out. She comes forward. She steps out. When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling.

[11:15] And falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed. She steps forward and declares what has happened.

Notice Jesus' response in verse 48. He said to her, Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Notice here Jesus forces her to make a public testimony.

You see, Jesus realises that what she knows in private needs to be made public because not only does she have a private problem, she also has a public problem. It's a calculated move by Jesus.

And she steps forward. She signals that she does have faith. A faith. A great faith. A faith that is tested and proved to be genuine. She steps out in front of the crowd.

Can you imagine the great testing that would have been? She steps out. But notice also Jesus does this for another reason. It's an opportunity for Jesus to show that not only has she been biomedically cured, not only has she been cured medically, but also he shows her that because of her faith, that she has been embraced into the family of God.

[12:46] Jesus calls her daughter. She's been made whole. Now she knows what God has done for her. But not only that, the crowds do as well.

And so they are forced to accept that she has been healed. What an amazing little side, this little story. We started off with a story with a little girl who was sick.

And here we have a woman, a woman who has been bleeding for 12 years, and Jesus cures her. The miracle points very clearly to Jesus, to his great authority.

He's a man of great power, able to heal, able to heal by simply touching the edge of his cloak. But notice also the other important feature of the story, the woman's faith.

Her response to Jesus' authority, her faith. Well, what a great story. But the story has actually only just caused a delay, a very costly delay.

[13:53] Let's read verse 49. While he was still speaking, someone came from the leader's house to say, your daughter is dead. Do not trouble the teacher any longer.

The delay has caused terrible tragedy. By delaying, by Jesus interacting with this woman, it's held Jesus up. And in that time, the girl has died.

Can you feel the tension here? Jairus, here he is, his daughter. He's gone seeking out to find Jesus. And now his daughter is dead.

If only he hadn't been held up. You can feel the tension. We have great sympathy for him here. But notice Jesus' response. When Jesus heard this, he replied, do not fear, only believe, and she will be saved.

Here we have Jesus bringing out the message of chapter 8. This is the great message. It's the theme throughout all these chapters. Do not fear.

[15:03] Only believe, and she will be saved. Remember the storm. There they are. They're in terrible fear, and they wake up Jesus saying, don't you care about to die? They're fear of dying.

And Jesus stands up and calms the storm. Did you see in the story of the demoniac, the people are in great fear of Jesus. Jesus says, do not fear, only believe, and she will be saved.

Well, they go on. They move on to the house. Verse 51. When he came to the house, he did not allow anyone to enter with him except Peter, John, and James, and the child's father and mother.

Jesus arrives and only allows a select group to come into the house. This causes a bit of a tension here. It's a bit of a confusing problem. Here we have only five being allowed in the house, but as we read on in 52, we see that they're all weeping and wailing, and we see them laughing a little bit later on.

What's happened here? Is it the five that are laughing or is it the crowd that are outside? Well, Peter here sets it chronologically out of order. He does this in a way just to help us understand, to understand the two discourses that are happening.

[16:31] The first discourse is between Jesus and the crowd. So the people that are wailing out outside the house are those, is the crowd when Jesus first arrives.

So let's look at that in verse 52 and 53. They were all weeping and wailing for her, but he said, do not weep, for she is not dead, but sleeping.

And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. Here we see Jesus interacting with the crowd. Jesus arrives and there's weeping and wailing.

The word that they use here is this beating upon the chest. Such is the mourning of the loss of this little girl. And how appropriate is the only daughter, 12 years old.

They are deeply moved by the fact that she is dead. What is Jesus' response to their weeping and wailing? He says, do not weep, for she is not dead, but sleeping.

[17:37] Here Jesus, Jesus asserts that this condition is more temporary than they actually want to think it is. They think that she is dead, but Jesus knows that this is only a temporary thing.

It's like he's speaking figuratively. She's just asleep. Well, on this response, the crowd laughed at him.

It's not surprising. Imagine being there, knowing that the girl was dead. And a person comes along and says, oh look, she's not dead, she's just sleeping.

I guess you'd laugh if you didn't understand who Jesus was. For you see, here they are, they are rejecting his declaration. The crowd is rejecting and refusing to recognise that Jesus has this power, power to give life.

Then we move on to the second discourse and that's between Jesus and the parents. What do we see that happens next? In 54, but he took her hand, took her by the hand and called out, child, get up.

[18:56] Her spirit returned and she got up at once. Then he directed them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astounded. Jesus crosses the boundary between life and death, clean and unclean, as he touches and calls out to the little girl.

For a dead person, someone who is dead, they were seen to be unclean, not to be touched. Yet Jesus reaches out and grabs her by the hand. He calls out to her and the effect is immediate.

She gets up. Then he directs them to give some food to her. Here he provides material evidence. Here is the evidence that they are not hallucinating.

This is not a vision. This is not like some ghost. When she eats, they see that she's indeed alive. She's been restored. Notice their response.

They are utterly astounded. Well, in this story, again we see looming large, this man Jesus.

[20:11] A man of incredible authority. Absolutely incredible authority. He is an impressive man. Just impressive.

He's a man of great power. Not only does he have the power to cure disease, he also has the power to raise the dead. He has authority over death. But notice also, again, notice the faith of the parents.

Despite a mocking crowd, despite the fear that he must have felt, they put their fear aside and trusted in Jesus. They put their faith in him.

Well, this is the only story that we have in the New Testament of a story that has one story with a story sandwiched in between. It's like two bits of bread with the meat in between.

We have the one story, the bread on either side, with another story in the middle. And Luke does this for a reason. He does this to bring about a dramatic effect.

[21:21] For as we read through it, the whole drama slows down. It creates tension and sympathy. It forces also the reader to see that there is a great unity between the two stories.

So when we come to look at the story for ourselves, we need to look at both stories together as a unity. Therefore, the first big point that we want to pull out of this story is we see that Jesus is a man of great authority.

The miracles point to him and his power. His power over disease and death. He is an impressive man. A number of years ago, I went and saw open heart surgery.

We had a friend in our church who was a surgeon who conducted open heart surgery and I thought it would be a fascinating thing to see open heart surgery. They were impressive people.

They opened up the chest to do this open heart surgery. Very impressive to see this done. Mind-blowing. And during the course of the operation, I spoke to the surgeon and I said, this surgery that we're doing here, this bypass, this heart bypass, this bypass for the heart. [22 : 39] How long will he have to live because of this? And the surgeon says, well, five, ten years. I guess it depends on how he looks after himself. Impressive man giving an extra five, ten years of life.

Look at Jesus. Here is a man who gives life. People who are dead, utterly dead, giving them life. When we see such power, we're forced to ask, who is this man? Who is this man, Jesus? This is the big question that's been running through chapters 7 and 8 that we've been looking at. It's the question that John asks in chapter 7. Are you the one? It's the question that comes up in next week in chapter 9 which Peter asks, which Jesus asks Peter, who do people say that I am? Who is Jesus? That is the question that when we look at this man Jesus with such power. And the answer comes very clearly as we read through Luke. He is the Messiah. He is the great one that has been prophesied in the Old Testament.

[23 : 48] He is the one to bring about God's promises. He is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. In Isaiah, he is the one to bring salvation, to bring rest, to bring people back into relationship with God. But it also shows his divinity. It shows that he is divine. For only God could give resurrected life to Israel.

We see this back in Ezekiel chapter 37. We see it in Isaiah. God is the only one who can give life back to the dead.

And Jesus is doing that. He is showing that he is divine. He is a part of God. Well, that's the first thing that we see from these two stories.

That Jesus is a man of authority. But also, these stories, the two stories, help us see that there is a proper response to a person of such authority.

[24 : 47] Both stories show how people recognised his authority. We see a woman coming up and touching Jesus' garment. We see Jairus coming up and asking Jesus to come and cure his daughter.

But then, not only that, trusting Jesus, not fearing, despite the laughing of the crowds. They recognised Jesus' authority. Not only that, they acted on it.

That despite the barriers or the pressure, they acted without fear. Despite the fact that she was unclean, she touched Jesus. Despite the mocking crowd, they trusted without fear.

They put their trust in him. They are figures of faith. And it's their faith that saved them in the end. It's the faith that brought them wholeness.

This is the proper and right response that we are to have to Jesus' authority. Note the contrast with the disciples that we've only had last week when they're on the boat.

[25 : 53] They're great fear. Here are two characters without fear. Note also the crowd. The crowd and the story.

The way they laughed and did not recognise Jesus. They did not respond to his authority. I think the last thing to note from this story also is the unusual way that it ends.

Look there at the end of verse 56. Her parents were astonished, astounded, but he ordered them to tell no one what had happened. Noticed here the call for silence.

It's picked up I think in verse 51 also. Where only a small group are brought in. Jesus only has a select group. Jesus calls for them to be silent, not to declare it about this great miracle that he's done.

For the people, the crowd around him are fascinated with miracles. That's what they want to focus in on. They want to focus in on the miracles that Jesus has done. They misunderstand his mission.

[27 : 04] But Jesus knows his mission. He knows that the miracle that he has performed is a foretaste of what is to come.

he knows it's a foretaste of his death and his resurrection. He knows that it is a foretaste of the future.

For at that point of Jesus' death and resurrection, he defeated death once for all. He tasted death, but death could not hold him. On the cross, he died and took the punishment, punishment that people deserve, that of death for disobeying God.

He defeated it and he rose again. Here, Jesus, in these stories of the miracles that Jesus performed, particularly of those where people are raised, is a foretaste of what Jesus came to do. Can you imagine being a first century reader of this book of Luke? In an era when people were dying, death was a shadow that was all around them.

[28 : 18] You couldn't help but see it, feel it, all the time. In the first century, this was a powerful message. He was a man who could conquer death, who took the sting out of death.

What about for us? What about for us? As we read this message, I think we're not often faced with the shadow of death.

September 11 brings it home. Funerals of friends and family bring it home. But on the whole, we don't think about it much. But there is a great message here.

Jesus has defeated death for us. He has the authority in the miracle stories that we see tonight. We see that he has the authority to do it. His resurrection guarantees it.

And all of it points to the fact that God's kingdom is coming. It is guaranteed. One day a world of pain, politics, disease, fear, will be replaced by the kingdom of God in all its glory.

[29 : 34] Jesus is our guarantee. Such power and authority is found in Jesus. What is your response to it? Well, from today's reading, from this shadow that Jesus gives us here, we see that we need to recognise that Jesus has this authority, that healing is found in him, true healing, that we are to act on it despite the barriers and pressures that are put upon us.

We need to act without fear. We need to put our trust in him for the future. Are you trusting in Jesus? Tonight we heard that there's a funeral seminar coming up where you can plan for your funeral.

Well, at the auction night that we had, I bid fiercely for Moore's legal funeral kit.

I have it here. It was worth \$440 but I think I got it for the bargain price of \$380. Saved \$60. I thought this is good. I'm planning for my future here.

I'm thinking about my funeral and all the things that I need to think about that. My will, we don't have a will at the moment so I can organise that there and it's all in the kit. It even came with a nice little key ring.

[31 : 03] They're very kind aren't they? Look at that, a lovely little key ring as well. I'm looking forward to that Danny later on. How are you planning for your future?

You might like to come along to the funeral seminar, but I guess I want to think more than just the funeral seminar. What are you doing now? How are you planning for your future now?

What are you doing at school, your jobs? How are you planning for your future? What are you doing? Because I think when we think about that and how we are planning for the future and what our interests and what we're putting our trust in, that points to whether we're trusting in Jesus for our future.

A very wise man in Sydney ended up being the Archbishop of Sydney. He had this motto that he lived as he would die tomorrow, as if he would die tomorrow.

So knowing that he might die tomorrow or at any moment, he lived in light of that. But he also planned for the next 100 years. Because of that, there are tremendous resources in Sydney because of this man's great planning.

[32 : 19] How are you living? What is your hope in? Do you know of your certain hope? Do you know if you die that there is a certain hope there for you of resurrection?

Do you know that there is a coming kingdom? Where there is no more pain, crying, mourning, or death? The shadow of death, that fear is taken away.

Therefore, how are you living? In verse 50, Jesus says, do not fear, only believe, and she will be saved.

Let me pray. Father, we pray that you will help us to be people who do not fear. Help us to be people who believe in you, in your son, and what he has done on the cross for us.

Father, we thank you for the great guarantee that you have given us through your son dying on the cross. Father, help us to live lives in light of this that bring honour and glory to you.

[33 : 29] Amen.