

The Widow of Nain

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- [0 : 01] Father, we do ask that you will speak through me, pour your spirit upon us as we look at your word. And we pray this in your son's great name. Amen. Amen. Please take a seat.
- I want to begin by answering the scoffers and the mockers out there. Yes, I do own a suit. It's the second suit I've owned. The first one had nice plaid checks with a big collar and flares.
- It's been a while. So this is the first time I've worn this suit. I want you to know. The only thing I'm not sure of is that the pockets are stitched up. I don't know if that's actually the way they come or what you...
- Anyway. For those who don't know me or we haven't met, my name is Ken. I'm one of the youth directors or youth ministers here at this church. It's been four months and it's been an excellent, excellent four months here for us.
- I'm also 45 years old in a couple of months. Victor Hugo says that 40 is the youth of middle age. Now I'm clinging to that.
- [1 : 13] My definition of youth so far is anybody kind of under 45 and it expands as we go. I don't think I mind getting older.
- I don't think so. I don't mind the fact that I'm getting... going bald. Although I preached in one church with a kind of misplaced spotlight and one young man in the front row sat with his sunglasses on the whole sermon.
- I didn't take offense to that. I don't mind the fact that my hair is going gray. I don't know if you... If you stand close to me, you'll see it. I am a little bit perplexed about the hair growing out of the ears bit.
- My father didn't prepare me for that. It hit me in my 30s. What does concern me is that every morning when I wake up and have a shower or whatever, when I kind of first look at myself in the mirror, I see something on my forehead.
- It never used to be there. And it's a statistic. Very simple statistic. And it says one in one. And every morning I see that statistic.
- [2 : 26] And it means simply this. One in one. For every person who's ever lived, that person has stopped living.
- There's been two exceptions for those of you who know your Bibles, but for most of us, for all of us, it's the statistic that haunts us. Now, when I was in my teens, I didn't believe in the one in one.
- No teenager believes in the one in one statistic. You see, teenagers are immortal. And we've all gone through that phase where we can burst through brick walls. We can do whatever we want.
- We can drive as fast as we can. And when you're in your 20s, most of us, who cares about it? That's for old people, the one in one. It wasn't until I was 35 that the one in one got stamped to my forehead.

I took a group of young people away. It's kind of a post-high school pleasure trip. You've graduated. Congratulations. And we went to this magnificent island in the north of Australia.

[3 : 29] It's a place, part of the world, where they say it's perfect, where it's beautiful one day, perfect the next. Magnificent. And I went for a moonlight swim, balmy waters, full moon.

It was perfect. And I went for a swim, and I finished my swim, and I went back to my cabin, took off my wet swimming trunks, wrapped a towel around my waist, and I went to hang the swimming trunks up on this clothesline between two fruit trees.

And as I'm clipping my swimming trunks up, I looked, and here's a snake that's wrapped around the clothesline. Now, I know a lot about snakes because, you see, I had a pet turtle as a kid.

And so I looked at this snake, and I thought, now, from what I've read in Australia, the dangerous snakes slither on the ground, and the non-dangerous ones live in the trees.

Now, why has God given me this snake? And I thought, ah, of course. It's to scare the girls. That's why God has given me this snake. So I tightened my towel up, and I grabbed the snake off the clothesline, and I walked down the stairs, and the first girl I saw was this girl from a fairly well-known Australian family.

[4 : 42] She's never seen a snake other than in the zoo, and she gave me one of these looks like, Ken, you are such a loser. Only a loser would bring a rubber snake on a can. And I let go of the snake's head, and it went out, and its tongue flicked.

And it was very close to her face, and she let out this sound, kind of a, I can't reproduce it, it was like, ugh, type of sound. And it was a sound that said to me that she, if I kept going, she was going to need some fairly intensive therapy later on, so I'd better pull the snake away and move on.

This kid came running up, his name was Mark, and he went, ah, a snake, can I go scare some girls? I thought to myself, great minds think alike, of course you can. Here's the snake, and I, as I went to hand him the snake, I took my right hand off, and the snake bit me.

The snake was fed up with playtime, and he bit me. And I looked, and I saw this trickle of blood come down my finger, and I suddenly realized three things. I knew nothing about snakes.

I had a pet turtle as a kid. This could be like, you know, type, pan, death, adder, cobra snake. I wouldn't have a clue. And so, my second thought was, I'm going to die.

[5 : 57] I'm going to die from this snake here. My third thought was, I'm going to fall down and my towel might come off. So, if I'm going to die, I want to die in my room with some clothes on.

And so, I said to Mark, let the snake go off into the jungle. Don't scare any more girls. And I went into my room, and I put some clothes on, and for eight minutes, because I figured that's about what I had if it was a type hand, cobra, death adder.

For eight minutes, I did this. Now, if you've ever had an experience like that, or a more serious one-on-one experience, your life does flash, and you think very carefully, and suddenly you get this indelible imprint on your mind that you are not immortal.

You are just like everybody else. It's an uncomfortable feeling when it dawns on you. I am just like everybody else.

Now, I chose the story that we're going to look at in the New Testament, because it's one of my favorites. And it's a story that reminds me of something that I was taught as a kid.

[7 : 12] I didn't believe it as a kid. But I was taught the saying, Jesus is mighty to save. Jesus is mighty to save.

And if there's ever a story in human history that attests to that fact, it's this one. If you are a person who likes to follow on, it's on page 62. I'm actually going to read it again for us.

If you are a person who just likes to listen, that's fine. Page 62 in the New Testament. Chapter 7, verse 11.

Soon afterward, he went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother.

She was a widow, and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and he said to her, Do not weep.

[8 : 15] And he came and touched the bier, and the bier-bearer stood still. And he said, Young man, I say to you, arise. And the young man sat up and began to speak, and he gave him to his mother.

Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, A great prophet has arisen among us, and God has visited his people. And this report concerning him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding area.

Now, it's a fairly simple story to comprehend. My guess is there's not a lot of things in it that are hard to understand, but let's just kind of stroll through it. Here's Jesus.

If you read the previous story, he's just healed a fairly well-known local dignitary's servant, and it's quite an awesome miracle.

And news is spreading around Jesus, and he's walking from town to town, and he's got a crowd with him. And he walks up to a town called Nain. And it's a fairly small town.

[9 : 14] You can actually still go there. It's a small village. And it has a fence around it to keep, you know, robbers out. It's got a gate. And just out from the town are some cliffs. There's some mountains where they dig holes in the side of the cliff, and they bury people.

And Jesus can hear and see the funeral. In those days, you would pay people to shout and mourn and cry and beat themselves. It was a paid gig for some people.

And so Jesus can hear them, and what he can see is a lady walking ahead of all of them. She is the one who is grieving. And he can, as he approaches, he finds out that in that coffin, it's actually a basket, an open basket, is a young man.

We don't know how old he is. He can be 14. He can be 24. We do know this, that she's a widow. Now, every funeral that you go to has its tragic edge to it.

But there are some funerals that you go to, car accidents with a number of young people in them, people who've been taken too early. There are some funerals you go to, and there's an edge to it unlike any other funeral, a tragic edge.

[10 : 34] And this one has that edge. Because this woman is a widow. Obviously, her husband has passed. Her son has passed.

This is the worst kind of funeral. Her financial future is in jeopardy with this young man dying. Being in youth ministry for a number of years, probably the most unpleasant experience you can have is to go to a young person's funeral.

He goes with the job. Now, God has been gracious. I haven't been to that many, but I've been to a couple. And one of the first ones I went to was a young man named James. His dad had died of cancer six months before.

And James blew a gasket and just spun out of control. And he thought, I'm just going to drink myself stupid. That's what I'm going to do the rest of my life. So one night, he snuck out, took the car keys, grabbed a bottle, and drove out and drunk himself stupid.

And driving home into a giant boulder that was on the side of the road, killed himself. Now, I was at that funeral, and I remember seeing his mother.

[11 : 46] There were no tears. There was no wailing. There was emptiness and a shell. She was dried out of anything that she could give.

Her son was gone. Now, Jesus walks up, and he says two words, or three words, depending on your Bible translation.

He says, don't cry. Now, we have all, I take it, or most of us, have been to a funeral. And I want you to imagine somebody walks up, and he says, people, don't cry.

Now, he is not saying, stiff upper lip, people. Keep it in. Keep it in. Decorum. That's not what he's saying. What he is saying is, I am here.

And with a set of divine timing, with a set of divine circumstance, the one who can reverse this horrible situation has come. Now, the mourners, be quiet.

[12 : 52] They are probably wondering what is going on. Are they going to lose pay over this? And they, be quiet. And Jesus walks up, and he touches the basket.

That is a no-no. You touch the basket, you are defiled, you are dirty. You don't do that. And Jesus walks up, and he touches the basket. Now, again, I want you to think about the last funeral you went to.

And if you've never been to a funeral, I want you to try to keep this in your brain for the next funeral, the first funeral you go to. Because there's no feeling like it. There's no cultural function that we do together with that same feeling of a funeral.

There's a feeling of finality and dread for many funerals and kind of this imposing feeling that's crashing down on you.

It's over. For him there or her there, it's over. And there's no feeling like it. And if you are a reasonable person, I think you have in the back of your brain, can anybody do anything?

[14 : 08] Can anybody do anything? And Jesus comes, and he touches that coffin. And mothers, here are some great words.

He gives the boy back to his mother. I want you to ponder those words. He is ripped away from the mother. And Jesus conquers death and gives the boy back.

Now there is rarely a better picture in the history of mankind than that one right there. Here's a young man. He is back from death. She is rescued from loneliness, from grief, possibly from poverty.

Now one thing that's interesting about this story is sometimes Jesus does a miracle. And it's to show who he is. In John, they're called signs. I'm going to show you a sign of who I am.

And I wonder if this miracle is not one of those. Now you might disagree with this, and I think we can disagree on this. I wonder if this is just a sign of Jesus' awesome compassion for this woman.

[15 : 17] He doesn't say anything like, I have the gift of life. Look to me. He doesn't say anything like that. He just sees this grieving mother and he says, this situation is terrible.

And he walks up, touches the coffin, says to the young man, go back to your mother. And it is a great story of compassion. Now there's some words in there that you might have missed.

I missed them the first 20 or so times I read this passage. The young man begins to speak. He begins to talk. Now as I read this closely, I thought, what's he saying?

Why does Luke say that? And what is he saying? Now in my kind of 70s glory days childhood, I'm thinking, he sat up and he went, whoa. He probably didn't say that.

He probably sang, wow. What happened? I went for the ball. I didn't see the chariot. Now I'm here.

[16 : 20] What's going on? Now Luke tells us that he spoke because it's a sign that he was alive. That's why Luke says it. This young man was truly alive.

He was truly dead. It was not a resuscitation where Jesus kind of bangs the coffin and oh, oh my goodness. Jesus brought this young man back.

Now the crowd goes nuts as you would expect. They're filled with awe. They think somebody like Elijah has come back. You might know there's a story very similar where Elijah heals somebody.

Maybe it's Elisha, one of the great ones. Maybe what they failed to see, I don't know, was that one way greater than Elijah or Elisha was here.

Now where do we take this? Where do you take this great story? What do you do with it when you walk out? Let me give you two things to think about. The first one is this.

[17 : 22] Jesus is mighty to save. For the first time in the book of Luke, Luke calls Jesus the Lord.

You see, the Lord is here. And the Lord has the power to save. For those of you who might be unfamiliar with the Bible, if you keep reading, you keep reading, you're going to see lots of power stories of Jesus who has power.

And then you're going to get to the end. And you're going to get to the story that we're going to celebrate Thursday, Friday, and Sunday where Jesus has immense power even over his own death.

And Jesus dies and then comes to life. And he comes to life to give us life. Paul says much later, our Savior, Jesus Christ, has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality into the spotlight.

Jesus is mighty to save. Now following on from that, my second thought I want you to think about is that you are one and one, people.

[18 : 36] You are one and one. And I am 45 years old in two months. And every morning when I get up, that invisible statement has a little bit more ink to it. And it starts to shine just a little bit more.

That's not a hair loss thing, by the way. It's just because I'm getting older. It glows the older I get.

And I am reminded every day I feel an ache. Ah, that wasn't there. You know, I used to be able to play some basketball and it didn't hurt so bad.

What's going on? Every day, the one and one gets bigger and bigger and bigger. And I am totally and utterly and completely and thoroughly helpless.

Totally helpless. There is nothing I can do. I'm one of those suckers who sits at late night watching these TV shows. Can I look, can I look like this person or can I eat that food?

[19 : 41] Or I listen to the radio and it talks about I need to eat fish oil. Man, if I ate everything and did everything they told me to do, I'd live to 3,000. No, I wouldn't.

No, I wouldn't. I'd live to 85 or 90 or if I'm like my grandmother, 104 and a half.

But I am helpless and it's a helplessness that I can't overcome. One of the second funerals I went to as a youth minister was one that hit much closer to home.

It was a young man who I'd had in Bible study for 10 years. I knew this young man very well. And I remember sitting in the front row with the other members of his Bible study.

We were the pallbearers. And I remember having that helplessness just thoroughly come across me. And then I think, hold on.

[20 : 44] Jesus! Jesus is mighty to save. Jesus is powerful to save. And I don't know how it happened with Greg, but Jesus tapped Greg or tapped the car that Greg was in when he died or touched the box or did something.

And Greg went to heaven because Greg was a follower of Jesus'. You see, Greg was in heaven. And so I've got this mixture, utter helplessness and complete joy because Greg is with the King.

Now you may disagree with this next picture, but I believe that Jesus has just an awesome sense of timing. And when I go, I think I'm going to have that young man experience where I'm going to go, what happened?

I was this old guy sitting in the rocking chair. And now, here's this green field. And there's my friend Greg.

You see, Greg loved to fish. And Greg's going to look at me and he had a crooked smile. He's going to put the fishing pole down. We're going to hug for about a thousand years. Plenty of time.

[22 : 03] And he's going to say, do you want to see him? Do you want to go see him? He's really awesome. And we're going to walk together arm in arm to see the King who's mighty to save, who saved Greg, and who saved me.

Now, my friends, this week, one of the great weeks in our calendar, let's slow down, let's turn it off, and let's just spend some time reflecting on who he is.

And let's spend some time reflecting on who we are and how much we need him. Let's have a time of silence. Let's bow our heads. And then I'll pray for us.