

Christs Power Over Death

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the section of scripture we read in Luke chapter 7.

It's a long section, so just look through this very briefly from verse 11 through to verse 35. And we find the two sections there where Jesus raises a widow's son.

We find Jesus going into Nain. We'll read at verse 12. And as he drew near to the gate of the town, we'll read from verse 11. Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him.

As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother. And she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her.

And so on. It must have been wonderful to have lived during the time of Jesus' ministry here in this world, and to have watched him dealing with people in the days of his flesh, when he walked and he talked and he worked in this world.

[1 : 12] Now, of course, Christ hasn't changed. He is still the same, and he still deals, although not in a visible way with us, he still deals spiritually with people, with all the tenderness and all the compassion and all the mercy that he displayed in this world.

But in this three-year ministry that he exercised here, his public ministry, he interacted with people, he came into contact with people all the time. And we see the wonderful way in which Jesus deals with such a variety of people.

We've looked already at the first part of this chapter, and we saw how Jesus healed, how he dealt with a dying servant. And now we're going to look at him dealing with this grieving widow, and then with a prophet's confusion.

Now, the scene that we read there in these first few verses from verse 11 on, it's a very sad scene, because we meet a funeral, and every funeral is sad.

Every death is sad. And every death impacts communities, but impacts families terribly. Because a person's life, a family's life, is never the same after death has come.

[2 : 34] And even although the years may roll on, and decades may go on, there is still the sense of loss that always will be. Cannot have it any other way, because a family is so tight, it is so knit and so powerfully, that death always impacts, and death always hurts.

And what we find here, which makes the scene even sadder, is that as this young man is being laid to rest, this young man is carried, and it wouldn't be the same as we would have here, in the sense that it wouldn't be a coffin, it would be kind of a stretcher, and the body would be laid on the stretcher and covered over.

It wouldn't be like the type of wooden coffin that we have here. And as he was being carried out, and there was this considerable crowd following, the focus is on this grieving mother.

And what a heart-rending scene it is, because we're told she's a widow. She has already lost her husband, and here is now her only son. And we find here that the people are making their way to the burial place, and it's the kind of scene that would touch even the hardest of hearts.

But you know, when we even look at this, and every death does the same thing, reminds us not just of our own mortality, but reminds us of sin.

[4 : 06] Because it's sin. Sin ends in death. Sometimes people think, you know, we talk of the pleasures of sin. And of course there is pleasure in sin, because we're sinners.

And the Bible is honest enough to talk about the pleasures of sin. But what we've always got to remember is, that sin ultimately spirals down, and ends in death.

God, remember when he made this world, he made it perfect. When he made man and woman, he made them perfect. There was no sin, and because there was no sin, there was death.

But God said to Adam, in the day you disobey me, by doing the one thing I have forbidden you, you will die. And that is where death came into this world.

We know, we're not going through that just now, but we know the story of the fall. We know what happened. And that is why the Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death.

[5 : 10] It is something that has come into this world, and we cannot put it away from us. And it's part of what makes this world, although there's many joys, it's part of what makes it so sorrowful, is this enemy death.

The last enemy it's spoken about in Scripture as well, this enemy death. And when you look around this world, if you turn on the news, and you see the conflicts, you see the heartaches throughout this world, it's all because of sin.

Sin is at the root of all the carnage and the chaos, of all the bloodshed, of all the anger. And remember, war comes about through desire for power, for land, for greed, for all sorts of things. There are so many issues. And you know, people find it's extraordinary, but it's just, it's human nature, because we're all affected and stained by sin.

And sin brings the worst out in people. But sin ends in death. And there is only one person in the whole wide world who is greater than the power of sin and death, and that is Jesus.

[6 : 30] And that is one of the things that he displays in this passage, his own power, even over death. Now, you cannot read this particular incident here without being aware of two different groups, two different lots of people, and yet, despite the differences, there are also similarities, because we meet two crowds, one in verse 11 and another in verse 12.

It tells us that quite clearly, that as Jesus and his disciples came into Nain, a great crowd went with them. That's in verse 11. And then in verse 12, we find this funeral procession, a considerable crowd from the town was with her.

One was a happy crowd, because the crowd that was following Jesus was a crowd that was captivated by his teaching, by his miracles, by what he said and what he did.

And there was a buzz, no doubt, about this crowd. And then all of a sudden, this crowd that's walking through Nain meets this other crowd, who are totally different.

And as you know, when you see pictures from the Middle East, very different kind of people to the likes of ourselves, where we, it's I suppose, a cultural thing, where we tend to be incredibly reserved.

[7 : 53] We don't display publicly our emotion very well. It's very different in the Middle East when you see some of these very harrowing pictures, and you see the open display.

You see it at funerals, this open display of emotion, of wailing, of grieving. And it's very different from our own much more reserved, where we try to hold in and not outwardly display our emotion in the same way.

So there's no doubt that as the crowd following Jesus would meet this crowd, that there would be this open display of grief and of mourning. And so we find the two crowds coming, as it were, into contact, one with the other.

And although it's not the point here, just if we were to spiritualize things and just in a moment, here are two crowds. One is going the way of life and one is going the way of death.

And the crowd that is going the way of life is going the way of life because of who's at the front of that crowd, and that's Jesus. And in a sense, that's what life is like.

[9 : 06] Because there are only two directions people can go in, either the way of life or the way of death. And today, you may not think that you're going the way of death, but if you are not following Jesus, you are.

Just as we have in this particular, what is set before us, although that is not the main thrust of it, and in a sense, we're spiritualizing this, but it is still a fact that there are only two directions that people can go in in life.

Either following Jesus, which brings a person into life, and ultimately into eternal life, or else following death.

Because if we do not have Jesus, that's where life ultimately ends. Spiritual death and eternal death. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life.

Are you today following Jesus, or are you not? But then there's another difference here, and yet there's a point of similarity, because here are two sons.

[10:13] We have the son who has died, and we have Jesus, and they are both only sons. Jesus Christ is the only begotten son of the Father. This son here, being buried, is an only son as well.

But one son, Jesus, was alive, but he was destined to die. The other son here is dead, but he, through Jesus, is destined to live.

And it is only Jesus who can ultimately bring life into a person's soul. again, this incident brings two people who are sorrowing together, because Jesus is also, that was one of the things that was spoken about him in this world, that he was a man of sorrows, and he was acquainted with grief. So that, here is this woman, and she is grieving. Harrowing day, the worst day of her life. And yet, it is going to turn out to be quite an extraordinary day in her life.

But Jesus is also somebody who was filled with sorrow. Because, you see, why Jesus was a man of sorrows, it wasn't just because of what happened to him on the cross.

[11:39] Of course, that is where sorrow, sorrow was, reached its, its climax. His whole life was filled with sorrow, because Jesus met with sin, confronted sin, and saw sin at a level that you and I cannot.

And the reason why we cannot is because we sympathize with sin, because we're sinners. And there's a part of our nature that is content with sin, however much it disturbs us, and however much we may fight against it, there is a part of our being that sympathizes and sides with sin.

That was never true in Jesus' experience. He saw every situation for the ugliness of what it was. He saw right into the very heart of all these things.

He saw into people's hearts. You know, people who could be so nice to him and plausible, he was seeing right in, and he was seeing the ugliness, and he was seeing the twistedness and the deceit of their heart despite what their mouths were saying.

So Jesus was confronting sin in a way, at a level, in a measure that you and I don't, we don't even understand it. And Jesus was seeing all these things and just the pain of it would so often be pressing down upon him.

[13:08] And so he was a man of sorrows and understood, as we say, sin and pain and grief at a level that nobody else can.

And Jesus is able to identify with this woman and meet into her need in a way that even others cannot. And so Jesus, we find it's wonderful the way he meets with this woman.

And not only does Jesus not turn away any who come to him, but we find here that Jesus goes to this woman. It doesn't indicate to us that she came to him.

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, do not weep. It's wonderful, isn't it? That's what he said to her, do not weep. Now if you or I were to say to somebody who was grieving, now don't cry, don't be crying, it wouldn't really have much impact because it's the same way if somebody is really down to say to somebody, come on, cheer up.

Actually, you can, it can be worse for a person. It can, rather than doing them good, it can put them even more down by just saying to somebody who is down, come on, now cheer up, come on, brighten up.

[14:31] This person might be saying to you, you don't understand. I cannot. cheer up. If I could, I would. But because of the condition and the way I am, it is impossible for me to cheer up irrespective of what you say.

But Jesus, whenever Jesus says something like that, and here he says don't weep, Jesus had a reason for saying to this woman don't weep. And he's saying that because her circumstances are so going to change.

It's all going to change in a moment. That's why Jesus was able to say to this woman, do not weep. And there's just two things that we see here before we move on from it.

As Jesus touched the bear, this open stretcher, and he addressed this young man, I say unto you, arise. And he rose up. It's quite wonderful, quite amazing.

And no wonder there was fear amongst the people when they saw what had happened. but there's just two things that I want to say here. And the first is this, that the compassion of Jesus is as great today as it was then.

[15:42] The Jesus who walked over to this woman and who entered into her experience and into her pain is the same Jesus today because he has not changed.

He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. And we've got to remember that. And that Jesus is able to help and strengthen and comfort and uplift people in a way that no human can.

However, human comfort is incredibly important. But Jesus is able to work inside a person in a way that nobody else can.

As we've said before, that word in the New Testament where God comforts, it means comfort by imparting strength.

Often when we try and comfort somebody, we actually weaken them, we make them feel weaker because grief is weakening. You and I know if you've gone through grief that it actually has a weakening effect.

[16:55] you feel exhausted by grief. Grief exhausts. But the Lord is able to strengthen. That's what that word comfort, it implies a comfort that brings strength with it.

And that's what Jesus is able to bring and to do for people and in people's experience. And the other thing that we see here is Jesus' power over the great enemy, death.

Jesus spoke a word and a corpse came to life. This same Jesus who raised this man and who raised Lazarus and who raised Jairus' daughter is also going to speak this word again at the end. And it's going to have an awesome impact everywhere in this world. because this is what the Bible tells us, the hour is coming when all in the grave shall hear his voice, his voice, the exalted risen Lord.

They shall hear his voice and they will come forth, they will come out of their graves, those that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.

[18:13] There's going to come a day when the Son of God is going to speak, and every grave will give up. It's dead. It's an extraordinary thought, but it's true.

And the Lord alone has this power over death. He has that power over death spiritually today, and he is able to bring life into you so.

Nobody else can. You can't bring it yourself. No church can bring it. He alone has the power to do that through his word.

And that's what we need to seek and to ask for. But just moving on very briefly, we see then we move into the next, we get these messengers who come from John the Baptist.

And here is this great man, as Jesus said himself of John that a greater than John, he said that he is really the greatest.

[19:17] I tell you among those born of women, none is greater than John. And yet here is John, and he's sending his messengers to Jesus to ask, are you really the Messiah?

Now, people are divided on this particular point here. some people are of the opinion that John in prison had been plagued by doubt, that his assurance was rocked, and that he was sending these messengers, and from the reading of it, that's what would certainly, it would appear that that was the case.

There are others, though, of the impression that John himself wasn't doubting, but that his disciples were.

And obviously, John, although he was in prison, was allowed visitors, and his disciples were still coming to see him. And that John, then, sends his disciples, not that John himself is doubting, but his disciples are, he sends them to Jesus with the question, are you really the Messiah?

Because John knows, just like Philip knew that if Nathaniel went to Jesus, then they would see for themselves. So there are these two opinions, and the reason why some people say that John, that John himself wasn't doubting, is because John had such a clear testimony of who Jesus was.

[20:52] John himself was the one who said, look, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And so people say, John himself cannot be doubting. Now, I could accept either argument and either reason.

Part of me thinks that John himself didn't doubt. But then there's another part of me I'm just not altogether sure. Because in the initial reading of it, as you see it here, there isn't anything in the passage to suggest to us that John himself is not doubting.

if John doubts, he's not the first great man ever to have doubts. He's not the first great man ever to have his assurance affected.

John's faith wasn't affected, but your assurance of faith. There's a big difference between faith and an assurance of faith. But anyway, the fact is that there are questions, whether it is directly from John or from the disciples and John is sending them, part of the problem was this, when John came preaching, John came with a fiery message.

And he came preaching judgment, came preaching repentance, came preaching the kingdom of God. And John, it would appear that his message was such that however I come, the one who is coming after me, he's going to be far more powerful than I am, which was true.

[22 : 27] But Jesus' ways, his method, his ministry were so different. It was one, as we see here, not of fire, but of tenderness and compassion and gentleness and graciousness.

And yes, there was strength, tremendous strength. And there were times when Jesus hit hard. But there was this tremendous compassion and tenderness.

And it was all so different to what was anticipated. Because here is Jesus. And if he is the one who's ushering in the kingdom, how come everything is so, as it were, so meager?

He's not dressed in flashy clothes. He's not living in the greatest abode. In fact, he's saying, I've got nowhere to lay my head. He was like somebody just wandering about.

Teaching, preaching, healing. It seemed so different to what had been expected and what had been anticipated. And so the question comes, are you, are you really the Messiah?

[23 : 43] Are you the one or not? God? And I don't, if this is John himself, and there's no reason for us to suggest that it isn't, it won't be the last great person who has moments of doubt.

But what we find here is that Jesus does something wonderful with these disciples who come. He doesn't take them and sit them down and say, come on now, right, I'm going to preach a sermon to you.

This is going to be the most theological sermon you've ever heard. I am going to prove to you. No, he doesn't do that. He just takes them, as it were, on a day's journey with him.

And he just allows John's disciples to see him at work, where he's healing, he's raising, he's lifting, the blind are being healed, the paralyzed, have got life back into them, and so on.

And at the end of the day, he sends them back. Tell John that the blind, that's what he's saying to them, go and tell John what you've seen and heard.

[24 : 58] The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who was not offended in me.

And Jesus is really saying, you go and tell them what you saw. Because John knew the scripture. And the scripture, the Old Testament, this is an absolute description.

You go to the likes of Isaiah chapter 61. This is exactly the Messiah. This healing ministry where the blind were receiving their sight, where there were all these things happening.

And Jesus is saying, you go back and give the report of what you've seen, what you witnessed, what you've been part of. And then Jesus said that about not being offended in him.

And you see, there is an offense in the gospel. Because the world is often offended by the message of the gospel.

[26 : 01] There is something in the message that offends people. We'll see that just in a moment. But after John's disciples are gone, we find Jesus begins to praise John.

And that's important. At the end of the day, it's not what we think of ourselves. It's not even what others think of us.

The important question is this, what does the Lord think of us? That is it. That is the most important question for us.

What does the Lord think of us? Because the Lord sees us as an open book. book, our life from A to Z, 24 7.

Not just what we say, not just what we do, but every thought we think, everything. So what does the Lord think of us? That's the important thing.

[26 : 57] Well, we find here what the Lord thinks of John. And he says that there wasn't a greater than John. But the thing is, it's quite interesting when the messengers are gone, that Jesus says to them that great an all though John is, he says that I tell you among those born of women, none is greater than John, yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

Now in a sense that might seem quite a strange thing. But what we've got to remember here is that John was living at a time, John was living, he was the last of the Old Testament prophets.

Jesus heralded in the New Testament time. John was the one who grew up, who was ministering before, as it were, Jesus.

The Old Testament church were saved in exactly the same way in believing in the Messiah who was to come, who was shown forth in all the sacrifices. These were symbols of what Jesus was

going to do.

And they trusted not in the death of the animal, but in the death of the Messiah. They believed that the sacrifice, the supreme sacrifice would be in the Lord.

[28 : 24] And so they accepted God's provision, which would be the Messiah. And they believed by faith. It was great faith in the Messiah who was to come.

John was the last of the Old Testament prophets. And Jesus is now saying, and it's very simply, that's what he's meaning when he says that the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

Really what he's saying is that now in the New Testament church, now that the Messiah is here, now that there is new light, now that there is going to be the ministry of the Holy Spirit in a powerful way from the time of Pentecost, not but that the Spirit was ministering before this, a person was always saved through the work of the Spirit, applying the work of Christ.

But now we have a light that the Old Testament church didn't have. we have all the scripture and we are able to see in a way that they couldn't see, in a way that they couldn't comprehend.

Yes, they had faith, but we have so much more knowledge with it. And that's really, it's a very simple thing that Jesus is saying here, the tremendous advantage that we have here.

[29 : 46] But also we find that Jesus, and we're moving on very, very quickly here, we see that Jesus is trying to describe what this generation are like from verse 31.

And he says that, what shall I compare the people of this generation and what are they like? Jesus is really summing it up and he's saying this, they're impossible.

That's the word. They are impossible. And he shows how impossible they are by contrasting himself with John the Baptist. He said, John the Baptist came and he lived a monastic life.

He lived a recluse. He lived in the desert. Locusts and wild honey was his diet. He was there with that, in a dress of camel's hair.

He was a fiery man. He was the kind of person who seemed to abstain from everything. As we say, he lived a monastic lifestyle. And what did they say about him?

[30 : 52] Ah, he is a devil. That's their summing up of John. That he had a devil.

That's what it says. For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say he has a demon. And then Jesus came. And then Jesus lived a different style of life.

Because Jesus didn't live in a monastic style like John. Jesus went to the feasts. Jesus mingled with the people.

He was so often in the company of those that were despised by the others. He was with the sinners, with the tax collectors. And Jesus went and he ate.

And Jesus went and he drank. And Jesus mingled with society. And what did they say of Jesus?

Well, again, we read what they said. That the Son of Man has come eating and drinking.

[31 : 55] And you say, look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. See what he's saying? You can't win.

And Jesus is really saying, it's not just saying that preachers can't win. But he's looking at the generation and he's showing the great contrast in the way that he himself and John operated.

And the type of way they confronted people. Both are wrong. As far as the people are concerned, they condemned John, they condemned Jesus.

And you know, it's still the same today. there's something within people. And you know what the problem is? It's not the messenger. It's the message that people have the problem with.

It's the message. They couldn't have a problem with Jesus when you think about it. Although they did. But it was the message that they had the problem with. It's what he was proclaiming.

[32 : 59] It was what he was announcing. They could not find fault with his life. Now that cannot be said of any other preacher. There's loads of faults you can find in my life.

My life's full of faults. And it's the same of every preacher. So, but Jesus, you couldn't. Nobody could point a finger at anything he said or anything he did.

But you just see this deep-rooted hatred of the message. My friend, I hope today that you do not object to the message.

Because this is the message of life. It is the message of hope. It is the only message you need to hear. There is no other message. And that you will accept this messenger.

The messenger that comes with the gospel of Jesus. These are not my words. And I would hope, and I think this is what you've got to do, I would hope that who I am would not in any way hinder the

message.

[34 : 09] You've always got to look beyond the messenger, the preacher, to the message, and to the one who ultimately sends that message.

And that is Jesus. That's our focus. That's where I've got to go. To Jesus. Have you gone there today? Have you accepted him as your Lord?

Do you know what it is to have this life in your soul? The reality of him as your Lord. Let us pray.

Lord, oh God, we give thanks again for the word of God, for its meaning, for its relevance.

And we ask, Lord, to touch us in the very depth of our heart. Lord, we give thanks, oh Lord, for the wonderful way in which Jesus worked, ministered, lived, taught in this world.

Of the incredible impact that he had upon people's lives. And we give thanks that to this day, Jesus is still having an impact upon people's lives.

[35 : 19] Oh Lord, our God, do us good, we pray. Cleanse us from all our sin. Take each one of us home in safety. Bless those, Lord, who are far away from their homes.

Bless and take care of their loved ones. Forgive us all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.