

“YOUNG MAN, I SAY TO YOU, GET UP!”

Luke 7:11-17

Key Verse: 7:14

“Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, Get up!’”

The gospels tell of three specific accounts of Jesus raising people from the dead: Jairus’ daughter, Lazarus, and the young man in this story, which was recorded only by Luke. This event especially reveals that Jesus is the source of comfort and the life-giver. From day to day we live in this world, experiencing many things. Sometimes we can rejoice and smile. But often we are sorrowful, discouraged, fearful, despairing, and anxious. We try to be positive, but in the corners of our hearts there are shadows. When we carefully consider what bothers us, the root cause is the power of death. Not only is our destiny to die, but while living in this world we suffer under the power of death. In today’s passage we see a widow suffering under the power of death. This is not just her problem; it is the problem of all people, then and now. Death is so powerful that it rules people’s minds and hearts. Many people whose bodies are alive are dead inside. They live without meaning or hope or vision; just existing day to day—more like an automaton than a human being. Even Christians groan under the power of death and cry inwardly. It seems that people are swimming in a sea of death. How can we get out of it and live a vibrant and fruitful life? How? Jesus said to the widow: “Don’t cry.” Jesus said to a dead man lying in a coffin: “Young man, Get up!” Let’s listen to Jesus’ words.

First, “Don’t cry” (11-13). In this event, we can find two different processions. One is a procession of death and the other is a procession of life. Through these we see the deep meaning of the gospel. The gospel is the good news. But in order to understand the good news, we must first accept the bad news. We find bad news in this story of a sorrowful widow who lost her only son.

Soon after healing a dying servant and praising the centurion’s amazing faith, Jesus left Capernaum and went to a town called Nain, about 25 miles to the southwest (11). As Jesus approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her (12). This woman’s life seems most tragic—a symphony of sorrows, movement by movement. The first movement was the death of her husband. She became a widow. Widows are generally lonely, helpless, vulnerable and sorrowful. There is a saying that no one knows a widow’s sorrow, except another widow. Fortunately, for this woman, she had an only son. He must

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have become her source of hope, joy, and meaning of life. He grew and became a young man. As he grew, her heart was restored more and more. She might have searched for the best marriage candidate and envisioned the arrival of cute grandchildren. But one day, this young man died. We don't know how. These days, the leading causes of death among young men are traffic accidents (including from drunk driving), suicide, poisoning and homicide.¹ This young man's death must have devastated his widowed mother. She felt that she lost everything, including her reason to live. In her deep grief, she wailed endlessly, and for all who heard her, it was gut-wrenching. No one could say anything to her. All they could do was stand beside her and cry together. At first, they cried that the young man had died. Then they began to cry for the mother, and then for themselves, thinking of their own sorrow, and common destiny. In this way a dark power ruled over the whole town, and its cause was death.

Death is like a cruel tyrant, ruthlessly oppressing mankind. It has been characterized by the Grim Reaper, a skeletal figure clothed in black who takes people away without delay or mercy. It does not matter whether they are rich or poor, wise or foolish, famous or unknown. No one can resist it, or cheat death. Ecclesiastes 8:8 says, **“As no one has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has power over the time of their death.”** Where did the power of death come from? It was not God's intention for man to die. It was the consequence of man's disobedience to God's word (Ro 5:12). Romans 6:23a says, **“The wages of sin is death.”** People think that death is the end of everything. But that is not true. Hebrews 9:27 says, **“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment....”** God's judgment is as certain as death, and more serious than we imagine. Even to be in an American jail is unbearable. Lawrence Phillips, formerly a professional football player, was in prison for a crime. There, it is alleged he committed murder. Thinking he would be judged guilty and sentenced to 30 more years, he committed suicide.² Prison life was unbearable. Yet an American prison is like a luxury hotel compared to a sinner's punishment after God's judgment. But this is not the end of the story.

God had mercy on mankind, and promised to send a Savior. God prepared for a long time, and finally sent his one and only Son Jesus to save us from this awful destiny. Though Jesus is in very nature God, he came into this world as a human being and humbly served all kinds of people out of his great compassion. Here, Jesus served a widow whose only son had died. When he saw her, his heart

¹ <http://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/usa-cause-of-death-by-age-and-gender>

² <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2016/01/13/lawrence-phillips-death-prison/78742058/>

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went out to her and he said, “**Don’t cry**” (13). The Greek word³ for “**heart went out**” means to have great compassion that comes from one’s deepest heart. Jesus felt her anguish, sorrow and pain as his own, and wanted to comfort her by any means. Jesus was not responding to a specific request; it was totally his initiative to reach out and help this woman. This is God’s heart for human beings who are suffering under the power of death. In this event God breaks into human history purely out of his compassion to work for good. With this heart, Jesus said, “**Don’t cry.**” His words were more than emotional sympathy. He was able to solve the problem that tormented her soul. So his words inspired faith and hope in her.

Jesus’ words “**Don’t cry**” assured her; she did not need to cry because Jesus was there and he could do something for her. Jesus’ words brought real comfort. Who can say, “**Don’t cry**”? Who can fully understand our sorrows? Who can fully share our pain and agony? Who can really wipe away our tears that come from unbearable suffering and loneliness? Is not Jesus the only one? Yes, only Jesus can do this. That’s why we need Jesus. In order to do this for us, what did Jesus do? Jesus had to be made like us, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a faithful and merciful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people (Heb 2:17). Isaiah depicts Jesus as the one who suffered for us, saying, “**He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain...Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering...he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed**” (Isa 53:3-5). Jesus says to each of us, “**Don’t cry.**” Jesus is the source of true comfort who wipes our tears away and stops our inner cry. When we receive the comfort Jesus gives, we can also comfort others who are suffering under the power of death. When we have sorrow and pain in our hearts, let’s listen to Jesus’ words, “**Don’t cry.**”

Second, “Young man, ... Get up!” (14-17). There is a saying, “It is easier said than done.” If Jesus had stopped after saying, “**Don’t cry,**” his words would not have brought true comfort. Jesus backed his words with action. Jesus went up and touched the bier they were carrying the young man on (14a). According to funeral protocol, no one should interfere with a burial procession. And according to the law of Moses, touching the bier like this would make a person unclean (Nu 19:16). This is true of ordinary people. But Jesus is different. It is impossible for Jesus to become unclean; instead, whatever he touches becomes clean. Jesus is the holy God who makes people holy (Lev 21:8b; Heb 2:11). Jesus is the Creator God who

³ *Splanchnizomai* in Greek

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gives life (Jn 1:3-4). So he can stop the procession of death. At Jesus' action, the bearers stood still. Everything stopped; even the Grim Reaper halted. Then Jesus said, **“Young man, I say to you, Get up!”** (14b) An amazing thing happened. The dead man sat up and began to talk: “Good morning everybody! Wow, I feel so refreshed. Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Mom, and thanks everybody for coming.” Then Jesus gave him back to his mother. In this way Jesus turned her sorrow into joy. She could make a big smile. She had a reason to live—not just because of her son, but because of Jesus. When the crowd of people heard Jesus' words and saw the young man get up, they were filled with awe and praised God. They said, **“A great prophet has appeared among us. God has come to help his people”** (16). God was making his presence known through Jesus, bringing salvation to his people. This news about Jesus spread to the entire region like a YouTube video gone viral. Here we learn several things about Jesus.

First of all, Jesus has authority to give life. In the Bible we can find several instances in which dead people were raised to life. Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (1Ki 17:23), Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's son (2Ki 4:35), and Peter raised Tabitha (Ac 9:40). In each of these cases, the servants depended on God, who is the source of life, and God raised the dead to life. But Jesus' case is different. Jesus' authority to give life comes from within himself. Jesus is the author of life and the life-giver. His words have the power to give life. Anyone who hears Jesus' words receives life. Jesus said, **“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live”** (Jn 5:24-25). At the age of 20, I was dead in sin and full of despair. After stumbling in sin, I committed myself to a woman who then abandoned me. I felt totally rejected. I could find no reason to live. But God's servants spoke words of great hope to me and shared the gospel key verses. Through Romans 6:23b, Jesus spoke to my heart: **“...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** New life came into my soul and I could get up and serve God wholeheartedly. Since then I have lived as a full-time campus shepherd for over 30 years. This is not just my story; there are so many who have been brought from death to life by Jesus' words. Only Jesus' words can do this. There are so many wonderful books. But none of them make us alive. Only Jesus' words have the power to give life. Jesus' words give us true joy and hope. Jesus' words give us the meaning of life and purpose. Jesus' words give us strength so that we may walk and not be faint, run and not grow weary, and soar on wings like eagles (Isa 40:29,31). Let's listen to Jesus' words so that his words may make us alive.

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Second of all, Jesus gave a prelude of his own resurrection. Jesus' authority comes from his works as well as his person. If Jesus died on the cross and was not raised from the dead, he would be another tragic hero. We would still be in our sins and faith would be futile. We would still be under the power of death, and suffering Christians would be most pitiful (1Co 15:17-19). But Jesus has indeed been raised from the dead. Jesus defeated the power of death and crushed the head of Satan, who had held all men in bondage through their fear of death (Heb 2:15). Through Jesus' resurrection, he gave us final and everlasting victory. We can enjoy this victory in our daily lives through faith. That is why Paul said, **“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (1Co 15:57). Jesus also gives us living hope in the kingdom of God. People must have hope. So they put hope in something. But the things of this world all perish, spoil and fade away. They only disappoint us in the end. But God gives us a living hope through Jesus Christ. It never disappoints us. Peter exclaimed, **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade”** (1Pe 1:3-4a). Through his resurrection, Jesus gives us final victory and live hope. Thank you, Jesus!

Finally, Jesus has hope for young men. The young man in this passage was dead, and laying in a coffin, confined in a dark box. He epitomizes many young men in our time. Young men should be dynamic, passionate and visionary. They should work hard and study hard and dream about a better future. They should grow to become world changers. But sadly, many are confined in a room like a dark box. They like to watch “The Walking Dead,” and to play video games in which they usually die again and again. They are satisfied with C's, and see no necessity to prepare for the future. Many don't accept responsibility for their words and actions and deny any sense of accountability. In their deep hearts, they really want to be great and to serve God in holiness and righteousness, without fear. But in reality they are too powerless to do anything. It is because they are under the power of sin and death. They cannot get out of bad habits, guilt and self-condemnation by themselves. The older generation may lose hope for them. Young men may not even have hope for themselves. But Jesus has hope for them to become strong enough to fight against their sinful nature and grow to be godly. Jesus has hope for them to become passionate to do great things for God. Jesus has hope for them to become visionary leaders who can change the world.

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A few years ago, I visited “Sacred Grounds,” a Christian coffee shop in Lafayette, Indiana, owned by Tom Camp.⁴ Back in 1977, while intoxicated, he wandered into a church service to find his girlfriend. Without intending to, he listened to the pastor’s message; that day it was on deliverance from alcohol and drugs. Tom accepted Jesus and was instantly set free from his addictions. After a time of discipleship in God’s words, he married his girlfriend and had a son. The son’s name is Jeremy, Jeremy Camp. When Jeremy was 21, he married a beautiful Christian woman. After a few months, she died. Jeremy was overcome by sorrow, grief and anger. Yet at that time, he came to know Jesus more deeply. He found that Jesus fully understood his sorrow and pain. He found that Jesus gives victory over death. By Jesus’ power, he could get up and serve the Lord ever since. Many have been blessed through his music ministry. Two of his recent songs, “He Knows,” and “Same Power,” summarize today’s passage very well.

Jesus says, **“Young man, I say to you, Get up!”** We have little strength or power. But when we hear Jesus’ words, he gives us strength to get up and serve God. Jesus’ words have life-giving power! Let’s pray for many young men to hear Jesus’ words and get up! Let’s pray for older people too, to **“Get up!”** and be alive in heart and spirit, like an evergreen tree, and serve God fruitfully.

⁴ http://pentecostalevangel.ag.org/Conversations2009/4963_Camp.cfm