

Luke 7:11-17**CHRISTMAS: LIFE MEETS DEATH !**

Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain, and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then he came and touched the open coffin, and they who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you arise." So he who was dead sat up! and began to speak! And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us!" and "God has visited His people!" And this report about Him went throughout all Judea, and all the surrounding region.

What happens when a balloon being held by a happy child meets a pin? It's over. Sadness swallows up the child's joy. What happens when the beloved family dog meets a pick-up hurtling down the road? It's over. Sadness swallows the family. When happens when the joy of Christmas is confronted by death—whether near or far away? The festive feeling is over. Sadness swallows the joy. But, not in Jesus.

In our text, Jesus, His disciples, and a large crowd of people are approaching the city called Nain. This is the only time Nain is mentioned in the Bible. Nain was in Galilee, less than ten miles from Nazareth where Jesus grew up, about twenty-five miles from Capernaum where Jesus spent much time. Luke tells us that on the day prior, Jesus had been in Capernaum. There He healed a centurion's servant (a centurion was a commander of one hundred men in the Roman army). The centurion had not felt worthy to have Jesus come to his house. He simply asked Jesus to give the word. Jesus healed the servant from a distance! I'm sure as Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd approached Nain, the crowd was in a delightful mood. Why, they were with Jesus who in His love and mercy, in His power and mastery, healed sicknesses and ailments. He proclaimed God's compassion and forgiveness for sinners, lifting up the hearts and souls of those unqualified for God's kingdom and love. We have no idea how large the crowd was -- maybe a hundred people? -- caught up in conversation and a feeling of happiness.

As they approached the city gate of Nain, they were likely surprised as another procession, of adequate size, was coming out of the city. Only, this was a burial procession. A dead man was being carried out, on an open litter, stretcher, coffin, of some sort. There was no cover to hide or enclose the body. From the viewpoint of the crowd with Jesus, there was nothing to take the "starch" out of good day like coming face to face with death—not just pulling off on the side of the road as a hearse and string of cars with lights-on pass by—but on foot, seeing a dead man. The group from the city was surely somber, sad, and weeping. This funeral procession was especially sad. First, the man who died was young—not a man full of years having lived his life—but a young man, age twenty-five? five? thirty? thirty-five? Secondly, he was the only son of his mother, likely the only child. We read of no sisters at mother's side. It's sad to lose anything that you treasure. When you only have one of them and it is irreplaceable—a necklace, a photograph, a horse—this is hard. Thirdly, she was a widow. Who would support her and provide for her? With whom would she share family life? With whom would she enjoy meals? A sad situation. At the gate of Nain, life met death. I'm sure the happy crowd suddenly became very quiet, with sympathetic hearts.

Does your life at times turn sad? Is it now, even at Christmas? Christmas is a happy day. But what sadness is lurking in your life to sap the joy away? Have you had a recent death in the family? Is this your first Christmas without a loved one? Are you alone? Or alone for another reason than death? Alone in your heart, even in a room full of people? Do you feel unloved? Do you feel a misfit? Has your balloon of Christmas joy, or joy of life in general, burst, because you have done wrong, have disappointed others, have irritated others? Has your Christmas joy been swallowed by sadness? Do you feel like you want to be dead? Is the confrontation of joy and sadness at Christmas being won by sadness? Jesus knows your heart, just as He knew this mother's heart. He had compassion for her. The Greek word is very descriptive. He felt for her in His insides. Have you ever had that feeling? Something so sad, that your insides are moved?

Jesus cared about her, and Jesus cares about you. That's why He came to earth at Bethlehem—to be your Rescuer. He sees the state you're in. He sees through the big front, the false front, you put on, "Oh, I'm great, I'm fine." That's what everybody expects you to say.

Jesus said to her, and says to you, from His heart, "Weep not." These are not just nice words to say, customary words, social words from someone passing by. These are words from the Son of God, your Savior! Do you remember when you were young, and your parents would say, "Stop crying, or I'll give you a reason to cry"? Here Jesus says, "Weep not. I'll give you a reason not to cry." Jesus went to the open stretcher, the lidless coffin, and the casket bearers stood still. Evidently, they were at the head of the procession and had slowly keep moving. "There's no sense in stopping. It's a task that has to be finished. Jesus can talk to 'Mrs. Brown,' but we have to keep going. There's no turning back from death." They stopped when Jesus touched the coffin. Then Jesus spoke to the corpse! "Young man, I say to you arise." And he did! And he had his wits about him and began to talk! I wonder what he was saying? "Who are you, sir? What's going on here? Say, guys, let me down so I can get out of here." Jesus' word has power. Jesus' words are not just empty words. He Himself is the Word by whom all things were made in the beginning (John 1:1-14). Jesus created life. Here, He simply restored that life, that soul, to the young man's body, from which it had been taken. He will do the same for you on Judgment Day.

Jesus presented the young man to his mother—a present! What a gift! Beyond what one could imagine! Talk about Christmas! He hadn't waited for her to get control of herself. He didn't wait for her to get on top of things, or do her part. Without show, without fanfare, without trumpets blowing, He resolved her difficult situation. Jesus had come to help her.

The same is true for you. In regard to whatever is bursting your balloon this Christmas season, Jesus says, "Weep not! Turn it all over to Me. Stop trying to hide it. Stop trying to fix it—on your own." He's not waiting for you to solve your own problem. You can't. The root of the problem is sin—and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). You are like that dead man being carried out of the city, helpless. You are like that mother weeping her heart out. You are like the happy crowd suddenly silenced at the face of death. Jesus has fixed, and fixes, all. You are loved and held safe, washed clean and released from the grime of sin. In Jesus, the Father looks at you and warmly says, "For My Son's sake, Not Guilty! I hold you safe."

What a shocking turn of events! "Fear came upon all." Not fear for their safety, but respect and awe for the love and power of Jesus. *They glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us!" and "God has visited His people!"* The crowds began to "buzz" again—with amazement and wonder and joy. We could say it was Christmas for them! The real gift of gifts—the reason we give gifts is life in Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth paid the penalty for your sins at the cross and rose from the grave on the third day victorious. Your sin, disappointment, and the ultimate death are removed. *And this report about Him went throughout all Judea, and all the surrounding region.* Christmas joy in Jesus is too good to keep to yourself. Life over death, Christ over Satan, is the joy at Christmas!

Jesus has come to this earth; Jesus has come to gate of your house; He has come to the gate of your life. He has confronted sin, death, and Satan. He has brought life and salvation to you! At Christmas we celebrate because Christ come to meet death, and to beat death. May any sadness in your heart this Christmas, be replaced with joy and life in Jesus!

Unto you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior who is Christ, the Lord! (Luke 2:11).

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---