

THE LORD OF LIFE

Luke 7: 11-17

We would not have expected Christ Jesus to visit Nain when He did. At that time He was at the height of His popularity with the residents of the towns of Galilee. All of His time might well have been absorbed in a most fruitful ministry there. People seemed to be quite responsive to His messages. Why did He leave these eager crowds and go to Nain, which was only a little village miles off the beaten track in a very remote section of the country?

Perhaps our Lord went there because He was invited to do so. Doubtless some of the people from Nain had heard Him preach in Capernaum or elsewhere and had seen Him perform some miracles. If that be true, a vision of what He could do in their home community naturally impressed them deeply, for they were very much concerned about the conditions which prevailed there. They were grieved because their fellow-citizens were forgetting God and failing to appreciate their religious heritage. Consequently, they wanted Christ to prove to their people that God was still living and was just as powerful as He had ever been.

Christ's willingness to go to Nain reminds us that He is anxious to visit the out-of-the-way places as well as the large centers of population. Perhaps one reason why He does not visit some places is because He has never been invited to do so. It is remarkable how readily He has responded to invitations of people to visit their villages, their cities and their homes, even at times when He seemed to be engrossed in more important matters.

The people who accompanied Christ were joyful and light-hearted. Many of them were His disciples and followers. They rejoiced because of the salvation and hope which they possessed. To them Christ was the bearer of life, light, liberty and love.

Those who invited Christ and brought Him with them to Nain could not have staged anything more dramatic than the incident which took place at the gate upon His arrival there. Writing as the Holy Spirit directed him, with exquisite literary skill and without any elaboration of details, Luke recorded for us an interesting description of this remarkable incident. He enumerated enough particulars to give us a vivid picture of what took place there. This story suggests to us four significant things:

I. A Sad Procession.

As the Saviour, attended as He was by His disciples and a multitude of others, approached Nain, they came upon a scene of gloom and sadness. A funeral procession emerged from the

gate of the town on the way to the cemetery. The people of the East always bury their dead outside their towns, and soon after death takes place.

It is well to remember that the mode of burial among the Jews was not the same as it is with us. With them the corpse was wrapped carefully in linen, with the face exposed, and then laid on an open bier within plain view of all who saw the procession, after which it was carried to the tomb. The bier, which had narrow sides, was borne by friends who relieved each other at frequent intervals.

Those who were in the procession were on their way to the cemetery to bury a young man, who had been taken away in the prime of life. We are not told whether he died as a result of a disease or an accident, slowly or suddenly. His departure at such an early age was a reminder to all that no age is exempt from death. While the old must die, it is also true that young may do so. However, death never seems so cruel as when it cuts one off in the bloom of life.

What made this case even more sad was the fact that he was the only son of a widow. Moreover, he was the only son she ever had. She had been on that particular road before, having gone to the same cemetery on a kindred errand, namely, the burial of her husband. After his burial she had been left to face the hardships of life and to care for their son until he was old enough to become her protector and provider. Time may have mercifully and partially removed the keen edge of her previous sorrow, but now a season of great trial had come to her with the passing of her only son. None but a parent knows the agony of burying a dear son; it must be experienced in order to be understood. The bereaved mother might have borne her loss some better if she could have been soothed and loved by other children. Instead, she was left childless, which, to the Jews, was an almost intolerable affliction. This broken-hearted mother wept because the center of her affections and the comfort and support of her advancing years had been taken away from her. Many sympathetic citizens of Nain accompanied the widowed mother in the sad funeral procession. Their hearts went out in love to her because of her sorrowful past, having lost her husband by death and many, many days of dreadful loneliness having followed; of her bitter present, having lost her son by death and his body at that very time was being carried out for burial; and of her hopeless future, being deprived of her source of support and comfort.

II. A Sympathetic Person.

The contrast between these two converging crowds may be described as "life meeting death." Here we have Christ face to

face with the great ultimate problem that darkens, embitters and destroys so much that some even go so far as to question the love and power of God.

When Christ saw the procession and observed the extreme grief of the poor mother on account of the death of her bread-winner, He pitied her with an overmastering compassion. Her deep sorrow and great need simply caused His heart to be filled with compassion toward her. The love of His heart flowed out to her. The only appeal that was made to Him was that of the sorrow of the mother's heart. Her tears touched His tender heart. While the entire circumstances pleaded silently, but eloquently, on her behalf, the interposition of the Lord was unsolicited. Seeing that her sorrow was such as He could soothe and her need one that He could supply, He wanted to do something about it and did.

III. A. Supernatural Performance.

Our Lord's great compassion immediately went forth in action. No sooner had the feelings of pity arisen within Him than He insisted that the bereaved mother not weep because He was about to remove the cause of her sorrow.

Christ deliberately and quietly stopped the funeral procession. Without any display or ceremony, the Lord very courageously did the unusual and unexpected thing of walking over and touching the bier on which the young man lay, as if to say, "Hitherto I have proved My power supreme in the realm where men were bound by infirmity, disease and insanity. Now I claim for Myself the realm of death."

Of course, it was thought that He had defiled Himself, inasmuch as touching a bier was equivalent to having contact with a leper. Awed by His touching the bier, those who bare it stopped and stood still. They were filled with wonder, amazement, suspense and expectation. They realized that they were in the presence of One Who had the right to stop them, even on their way to bury a corpse. Silently and reverently they waited to hear what He had to say and to see what He might do.

With His voice of pity and power Christ gave the strange command, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." To the astonishment of all who heard Him command death to release the young man and life to take possession of him, he arose from the dead, sat up and began talking. When Christ gave the young man back to his mother alive, that extremely dark day became the most blessed in all her experience. There was a complete rebound from sorrow to joy.

This young man was a living monument to the power of Christ, and a proof of His divine authority, which none could gainsay. There was a touch and a command and the miracle was wrought. Reports of the miracle spread rapidly and widely. People feared and glorified God. They recognized that the Saviour had exercised the power of God. They knew full well that none but God could raise the dead.

IV. A Symbolic Picture.

This young man, literally dead, pictures untold thousands who are just as truly dead toward God and all things spiritual as he was dead physically to the things of the world. But our Lord Jesus Christ, who brought life to the dead when He was here on earth, is still working in the same wonderful way. He said, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." We, who are now Christians, were once dead in trespasses and sins, but Christ came and touched us in our dead condition spiritually. He spoke the word of life and it brought us to life, and today we rejoice that we have life in Christ.

This event was also a symbolic picture of resurrection from the grave. The resurrection of this young man, the story of which has been unfolded for our benefit, is a type of that resurrection day in the future when "the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." This glorious truth of the resurrection is absolutely indispensable to the Christian faith. The word of the same Saviour, that raised the young man, will one day raise all who are in their graves. What reunions will take place then, when the dead are raised and the Christians who are alive are caught up to meet the Lord!