

*Hope on the Way to the Cemetery*

Luke 7:11-17

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-Lk. 7:11-17 The first half of the church year, from Advent to Pentecost, is the "Festival" part of the church year. The non-festival half, the weeks after Pentecost, in which we are now, are referred to as the "Growing" season. However, as in nature, so in the church, sometimes things die even in the growing season. So it is in our text. For this Scripture presents to us the death of a young man at Nain, a sad procession to the cemetery and a meeting with Jesus of Nazareth. And it was then that everything changed.

It is this change that we want to underline for ourselves. For when our attitude toward death has been changed, so our attitude toward life will be changed, and we will grow in our faith in Jesus and in our Xtian life. Thus, we mediate on this thought, "HOPE ON THE WAY TO THE CEMETARY."

The city of Nain was about 25 miles southwest of Capernaum. Nain means beautiful or pleasant. But all was not pleasant on this day. For as Jesus, His disciples and a large crowd of people approached the city gate, they were met by a funeral procession, a very sad one. Not only was the dead person a young man, but he was the only son of his mother and she was a widow. This poor woman had endured the grief and trauma of burying her husband, and now she had the heart-wrenching task of burying her only son: the joy of her life, her protector and provider.

This widow woman experienced the fact, which we should all understand, that in the midst of life we are surrounded by death, and that death is no respecter of persons. Sooner or later, we all die the death that is common to all people. It doesn't make any difference whether we are young or old, rich or poor, an adult or child, we are all on the way to the cemetery.

No doubt, there were any number of sick and elderly in Nain, people who had lived a productive life and were waiting to die. The son of the widow still had much to do, his mother to support, a wife to marry and a family to raise. But he was cut off. Now he was being carried to the cemetery by people who were grieving and crying. Death always brings sorrow,

A deep sense of grief, loss, loneliness, despair and bewilderment all come together at the death of a loved one. Then we are prompted to ask questions like "How can I go on alone?" "Why didn't You take me, Lord?" "What am I going to do now?" "What is the use of living?" "Why, God, why?"

Death is difficult because it means separation. It is not possible to love someone, be separated, and not miss the person. If there was any real love, there will be a feeling of emptiness, loneliness and loss. But the real grief and sorrow comes from not knowing what lies beyond death. Physical death is only the tip of the iceberg. The Scripture says, "It is appointed unto men once to die and then the Judgment." The Judgment -there's the problem!

Death brings us into the presence of God to be judged. That is what makes death so dreadful for most people. They know that they will have to give an account of their sins under the law and judgment of the all-knowing God. That prospect scares people, makes all their joints come loose -and rightly so. That's why Adam and Eve tried to hide from God in the Garden of Eden. God had told them, "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." In other words, God said, "Don't sin or you will die, and not only physically but eternally."

When a person is found guilty in the courts of the one true God, such a one is doomed to spend eternity in the fires of hell. God has plainly said to all people of all time, "the one who sins shall die" "the wages of sin is death."

That death is hell, eternal separation from God. It is this aspect of death that makes it so terrible, horrible and therefore extremely difficult for sinners to contemplate and consider. Tragically and foolishly, the vast majority of people refuse to face the reality of sin, death and eternal damnation.

Yes, in the midst of life we are surrounded by death. But the good news of our text is that in the midst of death we come face to face with life. There is hope on the way to the cemetery. This sure and certain hope on the way to the cemetery is found in the Lord of life and death: Jesus.

As this funeral procession left the city of Nain on the way to the cemetery, it was confronted by Jesus and the crowd following Him in the city gate. Someone had to step aside, and it wasn't Jesus. He called a halt to the sad procession, told the weeping widow not to cry, told the young man to get up and gave him to his mother. Thus, death gave way to life, sorrow was turned into joy, the prince of darkness and death fled before the Lord of Life.

When the people saw what happened "they were filled with awe and praised God saying, 'A great prophet has appeared among us; God has come to help His people.'" Indeed, the greatest of all prophets had come to them! God in the Person of Jesus Xt had come into the world. He had come to help His people, to rescue all from the guilt and curse of their sins and the terrors of death. The writer to the Hebrews tells us the Lord Jesus Xt, the Son of God "came to destroy him who holds the power of death -that is, the devil- and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

With His rising from the dead, Jesus demonstrated His power over death. Now all who believe in Him will live even tho they die. Well had He said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. Whoever believes in Me will live, even tho he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die." Thus, Paul exclaims, "Death has been swallowed up in victory! Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory thru our Lord Jesus Xt.

Notice: "the sting of death is sin." It is sin that make death so terrible. But with His suffering and death Jesus has paid the penalty for sin. All sins have been forgiven, Thru faith in Jesus we have the forgiveness of sins, and where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation. Thus we have the hope of eternal life, a sure and certain hope, on the way to the cemetery.

I have conducted numerous funerals in my 55 years in the ministry. Some of them were heart-breaking and difficult. Babies just an hour or two old, a young mother and her year-old child in the same casket, gifted students studying for the holy ministry, and of course, mature Xtians, some in the prime of life, others old and feeble, longing to be with their Savior. I have often wished I had the words that would reverse death and take away the pain of loss. But, like you and all others, I am helpless in the face of death. That's why this miracle is so important and comforting, Jesus has the words and the power to reverse death. When He speaks to the dead, they obey His voice. He is the Lord of life. He is our hope on the way to the cemetery.

Some day my life will end. I don't know where or when or how, but I will die. My family will put my body in a casket and bury me in a cemetery. There may be a tear or two shed but they will be unnecessary, because I will only be sleeping. In God's own time, I will hear the voice of Jesus. He will tell me, "Wake up!" And I will. For with Job "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes - I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me."

Yes, dear Xtian friends, on that day my eyes, just like yours and the eyes of all the dead, will see Jesus. He will wipe all tears from the eyes of His believers, and bring us astonishing and unbelievable joy with the gift of everlasting life in the mansions of heaven. Together with you, I wait with great anticipation for the events of that day. "Come, Lord Jesus!" Amen.