

# The Day We Danced on Death's Grave

---

## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>11</sup> Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." <sup>14</sup> Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." <sup>15</sup> And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. <sup>16</sup> Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" <sup>17</sup> And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. (Luke 7:11–17)

### The Irony in Our Relationship with Death

- A. Death is a blunt reality. It doesn't speak politely. It doesn't respect our timelines. It doesn't care about our plans. It just is. And we have to face it.
  - 1. (Some of you, I know, like this woman and her son in our text, are facing it right now—and you just want to scream, or cry, or give up . . . just let the pain of living in a fallen world stop.)
  
- B. There's this strange irony in our relationship with death. I wonder if you've noticed it.
  - 1. In one sense, we are fascinated by it. I'm sure you've heard the phrase: "Sex sells". Well, I do think we could say with equal validity: "Death sells". It's in the news because it grabs our attention. It's in our entertainment—movies, TV shows, music, video games—because for some reason we're drawn to it.
  - 2. And yet, when death steps out of the screen, as it were, and actually knocks on our door, when it stops being something out there happening to someone else—where it's entertaining and intriguing—and it wants to come in and sit in our living room and sleep in our bed . . . we're terrified by it; we're confused, we're troubled, we're enraged by it.
    - a. Oftentimes we try to hide from it.
      - i. We hide from it behind our busyness—filling our schedules with work and play.
      - ii. We hide from it behind the noise of our modern technologies—we always have to have something plugged in, something on.
      - iii. We hide from it behind our cosmetics—we color our gray hair, or nip and tuck our wrinkles away, or buy clothes at Forever 21 even though we're 60. We don't want to look like we're dying.

C. But we are. Everyone is. And we have to face it.

## The False Gospels of Silicon Valley

A. I was in a coffee shop in South San Jose the other day and I saw a little newspaper with a headline that caught my attention: “The Valley’s Tech Elite Have Plans to Outlive the Rest of Us.”

1. I’m always interested in the false gods and false gospels of our culture. We all sense the need for salvation, especially from things like death. But we turn to different saviors. And I thought: “I wonder where people are turning here in Silicon Valley.”

B. So I opened up to the article, and I read this: “[D]eath, itself, is the biggest social ill Silicon Valley is trying to solve. We can build apps to keep track of diabetics’ blood glucose levels, to measure how soundly we’re sleeping and access medical records in an instant, but none of this stops the body from wearing out. . . . techie[s] are looking [for] ways to cheat death.”

C. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, they are hoping that advances in technology might accomplish this. I guess the biotech field, especially that dealing with anti-aging science and life extension technologies, has seen a massive increase in cash flow lately, particularly from these tech elite, billionaire executives.

1. Bryan Johnson, the entrepreneur who sold his online payment company to PayPal for \$800 million, was the first investor in a company named Human Longevity, which aims through its study of human genome sequences to, as its name suggests, increase human lifespan.

2. PayPal founder Peter Thiel supports a company in Monterey by the name of Ambrosia, where, quite controversially, they give older people blood plasma transfusions from younger people between 16 and 25.

3. Google’s Director of Engineering, Ray Kurzweil, is a brilliant man. He’s received honors from three U.S. Presidents; he’s been inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame; he was described by The Wall Street Journal as a “restless genius”; and he’s considered by PBS as one of 16 “revolutionaries who made America”.

a. But do you want to hear how he’s planning to cheat death? He’s handed over loads of cash to a company named Alcor so that upon his death his brain could be frozen in a sort of liquid goo until the time that technology has advanced so far that you can be woken up, brought back to life, and connected to some new body, an avatar that would live forever.

D. Why do I tell you all of this? Even billionaire, brilliant people, know that death is coming, and they’re afraid, scrambling for answers, grasping at straws, hoping in gospels that cannot save.

1. No, my friends, technology cannot undo the curse of God on man’s sin. Only Christ can do that. And that’s what this text is about.

- E. There are three things revealed to us about Christ in this text: (1) His Heart Aches (vv. 11-13); (2) His Touch Unwounds (v. 14a); (3) His Voice Awakens . . . the dead (vv. 14b-17)!

## (1) His Heart Aches (vv. 11-13)

### The Way of Life Meets the Way of Death

- A. After healing the Centurion's servant (last week), Jesus travels about a day's journey south and west of Capernaum to a town called Nain, in Galilee. Jesus, His disciples, and this large crowd now following Him, "[draw] near to the gate of the town" we are told in v. 12. And, as He is about to enter, this widow, her dead son, and another crowd now following her (the funeral procession) were about to exit.
1. And it's here at the gate that, as one commentator puts it: "the Way of Life meets the way of death" (ECNT). And we're invited by Luke, as it were, to just sit back and watch.

### The Only Son of a Widow

- A. Before we can go further though we need to make sure we need to make sure we've fully taken in the scene as Luke describes it here.
1. The man who is dead, being carried out to be buried, we're told, is "the only son of his mother, and she was a widow" (v. 12).
- B. There are many layers to the pain of this moment.
1. To begin with, we must understand that to have lost her husband and then now her only son would put this poor woman in a very vulnerable place in the ancient world. There were few avenues for a woman to earn a living. She would probably be dependent upon public charity unless she had other relatives able to help.
  2. But this pain resulting from her now financial and physical vulnerability, to be sure, would be nothing compared to the pain of a mother's broken heart: "You don't bury your son. Your son buries you. What am I doing here. God what are you doing to me? You take my husband. And now you take my son?"

### He Had Compassion on Her

- A. This poor woman can't hide from death. It keeps finding her. But now the Author of Life has found her as well. And His heart aches. Note v. 13a: "And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her . . ."
1. Our Savior is not made of steel. He can be touched. He can be moved. His heart aches with compassion for the suffering of mankind, for your suffering.
- B. This will be something that marks Jesus' ministry significantly. Indeed, it is one of the principal motivations behind all that He does. Compassion.

C. Two things we should ask ourselves at this point:

1. First, do we know that Christ's heart aches for us? Do we live under the skies of His compassion? Or are we all but sure that we are alone in the world. We suffer alone.
  - a. O child of God, you are not alone. You just might not see what He's up to quite yet. [Isa 54:10](#) is yours to claim by way of the New Covenant in Christ's blood: "[T]he mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you."
2. Secondly, as people learning from Jesus, being renewed into His image by His Spirit, have we learned this sort of compassion for others? When's the last time our heart ached for the suffering of someone other than ourselves?
  - a. Part of what convinces a suffering person that God is with them in it, is the fact that we, God's people, are with them in it.

### "Do Not Weep"

A. Now, we must consider Jesus' words to this woman there in the last part of [v. 13](#): "Do not weep."

1. If you did not know who this Man was, what a strange thing this would be to hear. It was standard in Israel to do precisely the opposite at a funeral. In fact, to stir up the weeping and the mourning, you were to actually hire professional mourners ("wailing women"), who no doubt were a part of this large crowd following the widow.
  - a. So Jesus' words, indeed, might at first hearing come off a bit insensitive, even rude.

B. But clearly Jesus does not say this as One insensitive to or out of touch with suffering. He says this as One who knows there is something on the other side of suffering, something God is planning to do for His children that we would hardly believe it if it were told to us. He says this as One who sees the abundance of life that awaits us on the other side of death.

1. He's telling her to not weep because He has plans and power that she knows nothing of yet.

C. Now pause. I wonder how we feel when God tells us things along similar lines? "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" ([Phil 4:4](#)), writes Paul to us . . . from a prison cell.

1. Even though we are not in prison cells, even though our suffering couldn't hold a candle to the suffering of the apostle Paul's, don't we sometimes still read these words as a bit insensitive, even rude?
  - a. "Rejoice? How could you tell me to rejoice, Paul? Life hurts. Things are going badly. I'm suffering here. I'm not a plastic Christian with a sparkling Colgate smile. I'm a real person and I hurt. You're so out of touch Paul telling me to rejoice always. You're so out of touch Jesus telling me to stop my weeping when I'm looking at my boy lying lifeless like a piece of meat on a plank of wood."

D. Yet still comes the soft and persistent voice of God to us: “Do not weep. Rejoice!” Why?! How?!

1. God sees through our suffering, our battles with death and its friends, to the other side, to the place that He’s preparing for us. God know that: “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning” (Psa 30:5).
  - a. Jesus, Paul, they see the morning, even in the dead of night. Even in the prison cell. Even at the funeral. And this story is in our Bibles to help us see it as well.

## (2) His Touch Unwounds (v. 14a)

### The Touch that Tears

- A. Now Jesus turns His attention to the dead young man, who is being carried on a “bier”, what would have been a plank, upon which the dead son would’ve been placed, wrapped in a cloth, but fully visible to all. And we read this: “Then he came up and touched the bier . . .” (v. 14).
- B. In our society today, touch has become taboo, and, to some degree I suppose, this is for good reason. We’re scared of it. We have to protect our children from it.
  1. No doubt some of you here this morning have been wounded by it—the unfriendly touch of an abuser. Maybe your dad. Maybe your mom. Maybe your boyfriend or your husband. Maybe a teacher or a relative. If you personally haven’t been affected by this touch that tears, then I am sure you know someone who has. I do. Many of them.
    - a. This is why many teachers are required to refrain from all touch with their students.
    - b. This is why when I went into Kaiser a couple days ago for a standard check-up, the nurse had to ask me: “Do you feel safe at home?” They have to ask this because they might get a woman or a little boy or girl in there who’s being tortured with touch, abused at home, by the very hands that should be nurturing them.

### The Touch of Christ

- A. But Jesus’ touch “unwounds”. It heals.
  1. Zack Eswine puts it this way: “The contact of Jesus’ skin with the stuff of earth dots the pages of the Gospels: bread and fish, a basin of water, a towel, a cup, wine, wheat, tree bark and tables, lilies in a field. Jesus is the One who gathered dirt into His hands, spit into it with His saliva, hand-rubbed the brew into mud, and slathered the damp grit onto the broken eyes of a man born blind (John 9:6).

Jesus touched the sick . . . often on the wound. Jesus touched the leprosy of the leper (Matt 8:3), the ear of the deaf (Luke 22:51), the eye of the blind, the hand of the feverish (Matt 8:15), and the tongue of the mute (Mark 7:33). This was pitiful [or compassionate] touch (Matt 20:34).

. . . Such touch, like a righteous army, thoroughly routs the abuse and neglect of enemy hands that intend harm to the infirmed. We the sick long for this Jesus touch that defends and comforts. . . . The touch of Jesus’ pity preaches such hope” (The Imperfect Pastor, 190).

- B. Jesus' touches the bier. An act that would have made Him ceremonially unclean according to Jewish law (Num 19).
  - 1. But Jesus seems unconcerned with this. His compassion compels Him to touch the corpse, to bring cleanness and life to this young man, even if it means ultimately Christ Himself will have to become the unclean and dead thing on the cross. "Bury Me outside the city gate. But don't you bury this boy!"
    - a. His touch unwounds.
- C. But what about yours? With your wife, or your husband, or your kids, or your friends, or the homeless woman in the neighborhood park. Don't underestimate the power of touch in Jesus' name.

### (3) His Voice Awakens (vv.14b-17)

#### Compelled Not by Our Faith But by His Own Compassion

- A. It's important to notice that nobody in this funeral procession actually asks Jesus to do anything.
  - 1. Many miracle stories in the gospels put the accent on the faith or persistence of the people coming to Him for healing. Consider the Centurion from last week. Jesus marvels at his faith and then does what he requests.
- B. But here, in our text, we are told of no such exchange. There is no pleading, there is no asking, for all we know there is no faith. There is just death, and sorrow.
  - 1. But Christ's compassion requires nothing from us. His heart aches for this woman and so He resurrects her boy!
- C. O weary, hopeless, faithless saint: Rejoice that it is not ultimately your faith that compels the hand of God to move on your behalf, but His own compassion! Your wavering hope will not limit what He plans to do for you in accordance with His unwavering love!

#### From Funeral Procession to Street Party

- A. So after touching the bier, the bearers stop, and His awakening voice is heard: <sup>14b</sup> "Young man, I say to you, arise." <sup>15a</sup> And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother." (vv. 14a-15).
  - 1. And with a word, Jesus turns a funeral procession into a street party. Where there was mourning and weeping under the shadow of death, now there is laughter and joy in the light of life.
    - a. We can almost see this woman dancing with her boy in the streets, the same boy she was preparing to bury just moments before.

## The Day We Danced on Death's Grave

- A. I titled this message “The Day We Danced on Death’s Grave”, not because of what Jesus does for this woman and her son here. But because of what He has done for all of us on the cross, and because of what He will do for all of us on the last day. It’s to these ultimate realities that this story points.
- B. In the Bible, death is called the “last enemy” (1 Cor 15:26), but not because it is the greatest enemy. It’s the last enemy with reference to the timeline of God’s redemptive plan. But the greatest enemy has already been defeated at Calvary: namely, our sin.
  - 1. “<sup>56</sup>The sting of death is sin [death exists because sin exists], and the power of sin is the law [God gives us His law, in our sin we break the law, therefore we are under the curse of the law, namely death]” (1 Cor 15:56).
    - a. But Paul tells us in Gal 3:13 that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” . . . on the tree!
      - i. Therefore we rejoice: “<sup>57</sup> [T]hanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57).
- C. Here is why the tech executives with their billions of dollars and the multi-PhD scientists with all their brainpower will forever try in vain to cheat death. They have no answer for the problem beneath the problem. You can’t fix death if you don’t deal with sin.

- 1. But Jesus, my friends, has done it!

## Awake O Sleeper

- A. And because He has dealt with our sin, the greatest enemy, we can be assured He will deal with our death, the last enemy.
  - 1. This is why the Bible doesn’t call your death “death”. It calls it sleeping: “<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. . . . <sup>17b</sup> and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:13-14, 17).
- B. Upon your death, your soul will go straightaway to be with the Lord, but your body will be “sleeping”. And on the last day, it will not be some biotech mad scientist in the Silicon Valley awakening you, it will be the sovereign voice of Christ, “Nick, I say to you, arise!”
  - 1. And our souls will be housed once more in bodies, only now, resurrected bodies that will never know of death again.
    - a. Christians don’t cheat death. In Christ, they defeat it. And they dance on its grave!