

“YOUNG MAN, GET UP!”

Luke 7:11-17

Key Verse: 14b, “He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, get up!’”

There are many discouraging and sad events constantly happening in the world: violence and war. There are sad events in our lives and the lives of our loved ones as well: disease, serious accidents, failures, broken relationships, and so on. Things often don't turn out the way we had hoped. How do we respond? Perhaps we get angry or sad or fatalistic. Perhaps we feel hopeless.

In today's Bible story we see that Jesus encountered a sad situation. It was a funeral procession—the funeral of an only son of a widow. As a widow, this woman experienced sorrow. Then she experienced even deeper sorrow when her only son died. Jesus took away her sorrow and restored her joy of living.

Can Jesus help us in our sorrows and difficulties? Yes he can. This is the faithful testimony of Scripture. This is also the repeated human testimony of those who have trusted in Jesus and those who continue to trust in Jesus. Today, we want to hear and meditate on two commands of Jesus in this passage: “Don't cry” and, “Get up!” May Jesus' words of life give you victory over sorrow and over the sting of death.

First, “Don't cry.” Jesus entered a town together with his disciples and a large crowd that was with him. The town was called Nain, a town in Galilee, not far from Nazareth. To hang out with Jesus must've been so exciting. Jesus was healing diseases, driving evil spirits out of people, and proclaiming the victory and freedom of God's kingdom. Jesus' group was full of life, hope and high expectations.

However, Jesus' group was met by a very different group when they arrived in Nain. As Jesus approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out. As we all know, death is a normal part of living in this world. We all have an appointment with death one day. So, to see a funeral procession is not an unusual thing to see. In Chicago, we sometimes are interrupted in traffic by a long train of cars with their headlights on and a bright orange banner with black letters on it that read, “FUNERAL.” There are many funeral homes and cemeteries throughout Chicago. Of course, at funerals, we always expect to see people crying, in particular those who were closest to the departed. A few months ago, I was greatly surprised when I attended the funeral of the father of two shepherds from Triton UBF. What surprised me most was when their mother, who had just lost her husband, stepped up to the podium as the last one to speak. She shouted loudly and joyfully as her first words, “Praise the LORD!” She had such strong faith in Jesus and the hope of the resurrection. She surprised and inspired us all.

As I said, funerals usually involve many tears and wailing. Luke tells us two details that make this funeral even more sorrowful than usual. The dead young man being carried out was the only son of his mother. Also, she was a widow, which meant her husband had

died and she had not remarried. We don't know how she lost her husband. Assuming she had a loving husband, she had lost her husband's love and support. After her husband died, she still had her only son. Her only son must've been her joy of life who gave her strength to live. Probably her only son helped support her with his labor power. Her only son was the love of her life. But he also died. We don't know how he died. Perhaps he got some disease like tuberculosis or polio. Today, these diseases are easily treated or have nearly been eliminated through vaccines, such as polio. Perhaps he got an infection. But they did not have access to today's advances in medicine, such as antibiotics. We also don't know how old her son was when he died. We only know that he was a young man and that he was the only son to his mother.

No parent on earth expects or imagines that their child will die before they will. We heard about the shooting tragedy in Uvalde, Texas that took the lives of 19 young children, each about 10 years old. I cannot fathom the immense sorrow of the parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends of each child after this terrible tragedy. What an awful tragedy and sorrow. Surely these children were all sweet and lovely, not yet hardened or darkened by sin's vices. To the eyes of their parents, they must've been little angels.

Jesus loved little children. When the Lord Jesus saw this grieving mother, his heart went out to her. The Greek verb for "his heart went out to her" is "his bowels went out to her." Jesus' deepest, gut feeling was moved to compassion for this mother who had lost her only son. Jesus was stirred deeply inside, and he said to her, "Don't cry," or, "Don't weep."

At first thought, Jesus' words sound insensitive. I'm sure you've heard counselors say that there is an important grieving process for people to go through who have suffered some deep personal loss, like the death of a loved one. In 1969 Swiss-American Elisabeth Kubler-Ross studied terminally ill patients extensively and published her book, "On Death and Dying." She proposed five stages of grief most commonly experienced by those who are grieving. The five stages form the acronym DABDA. They are: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance.¹ Denial is a natural defense mechanism that says, "I can handle only so much at once." The Anger stage says, "Why me? Life's not fair!" The Bargaining stage says something like: "Please God, if you heal my loved one, I will never complain again," or something like that. This stage also commonly includes guilt and asking the question "What if things had turned out differently?" Depression is the stage where you might withdraw from life, feel numb, live in a fog, and not want to get out of bed. Acceptance is the stage where you can move on with life saying, "I'm going to be okay." Grieving can come through the death of a loved one. It can also come with any loss such as job or income loss, loss of child care, loss of routine and a sense of safety, or loss of community and togetherness.

Not long ago, I was driving in my hometown of Omaha, Nebraska, and I was not far from my father's grave. I began to shed tears as I thought about my father: he never got to see

¹ <https://www.psychology.com/stages-of-grief>, accessed 6/12/22.

me graduate from college; he never met my beautiful wife Maria, or my 5 children. He never heard me preach the word of God. He died at age 47, when I was 18 years old. That was 39 years ago. My mother is still living at age 84. But I can still shed tears when I think about my father.

Then why did Jesus tell this grieving widowed mother not to weep? Of course, she would have reason very soon not to grieve for Jesus was going to do something that no one could've expected or predicted: he was going to give life back to her son. Is that the only reason why she should not weep? Do we also have reason not to weep when we encounter sorrows in this life?

Apostle Paul wrote, "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope" (1Th 4:13). When a person's focus is on this world, they will naturally grieve about death because they have no hope beyond this life. So, when someone they love dies, they are sad for the person who died and who could not live another day in this world. They are also sad for themselves, for losing that person in this world, and also in view of their own upcoming death one day. Without the hope and promise of heaven and eternal life in Jesus, people live in slavery of the fear of death (Heb 2:15).

Jesus said, "Don't cry." Jesus is not promising that we won't have sorrowful things happen in our lives, for everyone faces sorrows and tragedies, at least from an earthly standpoint. But Jesus does give us hope, peace and joy in the midst of death and sorrow. Jesus is our comfort in this fallen, hard world. In a beautiful passage about comfort, Apostle Paul wrote: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2Co 1:3-4).

So when you are feeling sad, remember Jesus who said to a sorrowing widow, "Don't cry." He is our hope and salvation. Jesus is the joy of living.

Second, "Get up!" Jesus' words, "Don't cry" surely astonished the weeping crowd. But then Jesus did something even more astonishing and controversial. He went up and touched the open coffin that the pallbearers were carrying and they stood still. Usually, in Jewish society, touching the dead or a coffin would make a person unclean. This was also true of touching a person with leprosy or a bleeding person. Their uncleanness would be transferred to make the one who touched them unclean. But a different transfer was about to take place to flow the other way, from Jesus to the dead.

After touching the coffin, Jesus spoke to the dead boy saying, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead young man sat up and began to talk! He was alive again! They had been taking him to the graveyard to bury him. But Jesus gave him back his life! Jesus is the Lord of life! Jesus gives life to the dead! Next, Jesus gave him back to his mother. Truly her sorrows were gone. Not only her sorrows, but the sorrow of the people was

gone as well. They were all filled with awe and praised God saying, “A great prophet has appeared among us! God has come to help his people!”

Jesus’ words are life-giving: “Young man, I say to you, get up!” Jesus’ words even bring the dead back to life. Once Jesus said, “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 5:25). Again, on another occasion, Jesus said, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life” (Jn 6:63).

The word of God gives new birth and new life to all who believe. Apostle Peter wrote, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1Pe 1:23). We all need new birth into a living hope. Peter wrote about this saying, “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. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you...” (1Pe 1:3-4)

Without Jesus Christ, we are dead in our sins, and we need to be made alive with Christ. Paul described our dead condition in Ephesians 2:1-3:

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”

That’s the bad news for all people, whether we like it or not, whether we agree with it or not. But there’s good news. The good news for all of us is contained in the next verses in Ephesians:

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph 2:4-6,8-9). Said more simply, the bad news and the good news are summarized in Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

All who repent and turn from their sins and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior receive forgiveness of sins and a new life in Jesus’ name. Acts 10:43 tells us, “All the prophets testify about him that whoever believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” All who receive Jesus and believe in his name are born again, through the living and enduring word of God, into a new and living hope. They were dead, and now they are alive again, in Christ, with Christ and through Christ. They now live for Jesus Christ who died for them and who rose again.

Have you received this new life in Jesus Christ? Has he brought you back from the dead? Has he saved you from your sins and guilt and condemnation? Are you a new creation in Christ Jesus? Are you walking in the Spirit?

Many young people who are in favorable circumstances struggle with depression, thoughts of suicide, eating disorders, hopelessness and meaninglessness. Two young men recently in Buffalo and Uvalde expressed the deadness and hell inside themselves by shooting and killing people randomly. This is one manifestation of being dead in sin and transgression.

Another expression of deadness or death that I have seen is in the emptiness of a lot of popular music, or the escalation of horror movies. Some music genres glorify death. In high school I even liked some music that openly glorified “Running with the Devil” or “The Highway to Hell.” So, when I became a Christian I stopped listening to worldly music. I realized it didn’t help my spirit to pursue righteousness and holiness. When I first came to UBF in 1983, Michael Jackson was wildly popular with his “Thriller” album (I’m sure you’ve all seen the Thriller short movie based on the title song). At that time, UBF’s late co-founder Dr. Samuel Lee called Michael Jackson “a despaired musician” and he also spoke out against the “hedonistic, pleasure-seeking mentality” in America. Actually, I liked Michael Jackson, so I was surprised that he said this. But with some reflection, I realized there was truth to what he was saying.

Christian singer Jeremy Camp experienced the tragedy of losing his wife in a battle with cancer. He smashed his guitar and wanted to quit singing. His life story is told in the movie, “I Still Believe.” God revived his faith and his call to sing. He wrote a song called, “Dead Man Walking.” He testified, “There was a time I felt emotionally and spiritually dead, but then God changed me radically. I was once a ‘dead man walking.’ I’m now a man ‘walking with God.’² Here are some of the lyrics to his song:

“I was a dead man walking, Until I was a man walking with You.

I was a blind man falling, Until I felt the life You’re calling me to.

Pulling me out of the darkness, and pulling me out of the lies, Putting the beat in my heart again.

I was a dead man walking, Until You loved this dead man walking back to life.”

My hope in life changed at my first UBF Easter Bible conference. It was one year after my father died by heart attack. I had been studying the Bible in UBF for about 6 months. The living hope in Jesus Christ convinced me: “There’s no hope in this world since everything perishes, spoils or fades some day. The only living hope is Jesus Christ, because he rose from the dead.” It was a life-changing truth for me. It was as if I had been dead but was brought to life, a new life in Jesus Christ. At our recent 2022 Easter Bible

² <https://www.ccmagazine.com/news/jeremy-camp-releases-dead-man-walking-music-video/>, accessed 6/12/22.

conference, we heard the life testimonies of those who heard Jesus' words, believed in him, and received a new life in Jesus Christ. They were brought from death to life. One was even saved from taking his own life. They were saved from being dead in their sins and were given new life in Jesus Christ.

Today we heard Jesus' words of life: "Don't cry." Jesus replaces our sorrows with his comfort, peace and joy. We also heard Jesus' words, "Get up!" Jesus gives life to the dead. Jesus gives us new birth into a new life with living hope. When we repent of our sins and accept the gift of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus Christ, we are born again. When we hear Jesus' words of life and believe in him, he gives us new life in his name.