

The Bible does not teach that Christians are not to sorrow when believing loved ones die, but we are not to sorrow as others who have no hope.

THE PRINCE OF LIFE IN THE PRESENCE OF DEATH

by CHARLES CALDWELL RYRIE*

An Exposition of the Miracle of the Healing
of the Widow's Son (Luke 7:11-16)

THE victorious reign of death will go on unchallenged until the resurrection, for there is no person save One who can break its grip on man. That One, the Lord Jesus Christ, three times during His earthly ministry returned people from the dead, and in His own resurrection became the firstfruits of the ultimate victory over death. One of those who were returned from death had just died (Jairus's daughter), one had been dead four days (Lazarus), and one was being taken to the tomb. This last incident occurred near the city of Nain which is west of Endor, south of Mt. Tabor, and about a day's journey from Capernaum. Two processions met that day near Nain—the one included the corpse, the grieving mother, the mourners and musicians; the other, the Prince of Life and many of His disciples. The meeting was not by chance and, from the account, disciples and ministers of this day can learn how the Prince of Life acts in the presence of death.

1. Christ Is Compassionate (Lk. 7:13)

A. The Cause of Christ's Compassion. Undoubtedly compassion is one of the chief characteristics of the entire ministry of the Saviour. In this instance His compassion arose

* Dr. Ryrie is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary. This is one of a series of articles from his pen on the miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

partly from the particular circumstances involved. Death had come and with it, as always, sorrow because of the separation and loss. The Scriptures never teach that a believer should not sorrow, but they do teach that his sorrow is unlike that of unbelievers who have no hope. The sorrow of the child of God is not a hopeless sorrow, but whenever death comes it brings with it sorrow as it did that day in Nain. This woman had already known what it meant to take leave of one dear to her, for she was a widow; and now she had sorrow upon sorrow, for her only son had died, leaving her entirely alone. These pitiful circumstances of this grieving woman engendered compassion in the heart of the Lord.

In addition, the Lord of Life recognized the supernatural involvements in the death of this boy. It grieved Him to see man, who had been created to be lord of creation, a prey of death because he had fallen into sin. Death, tragic as it is in itself, is made more tragic when viewed as a consequence of sin. All of this Jesus saw.

B. The Character of His Compassion. His compassion was extreme—almost violent, in a good sense. The word “compassion,” *splagchna*, meant for the Greeks “*the seat of the affections, whether anger, love, pity, or jealousy.*”¹ In the Gospels the word is used only by Christ, or of Him, except in three parables (Matt. 18:27, the lord who forgave his servant; Lk. 10:33, the good Samaritan; Lk. 15:32, the prodigal son). The Lord’s compassion was no passing lip-sorrow but a genuine deep-seated yearning for the plight of the widow of Nain.

C. The Constraint of His Compassion. Heart compassion motivates action. Moved with compassion He did something. Often this was true in the ministry of our Lord, and compassion became the prime moving factor in the performance of many of His miracles. Four thousand on one occasion and five thousand on another were fed because He was moved with compassion (Mk. 8:2; 6:34); two blind men were healed for the same reason (Matt. 20:34); a boy with a dumb spirit was cured (Mk. 9:22) and a leper cleansed (Mk.

¹J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians*, p. 86.

1:41) because the Saviour was moved with compassion; and the sick in general benefited from the constraining compassion of Christ (Matt. 14:14). Genuine compassion always issues in concrete action (Jas. 2:15).

2. Christ Is Commanding (Lk. 7:13-14)

The natural man is a fearful coward in the face of death (Heb. 2:14-15). Only Christ or a man in Christ can be commanding instead of cowardly in this circumstance. So to the living mother and mourners in this procession outside the city of Nain, the Lord of Life commanded: "Weep not." This is a word of counsel as much as it is of consolation. How often ministers of the Gospel today need to follow a similar course of action in the face of death. The Lord was not saying that sorrow is out of place, but He commanded the loud, audible sobbing to cease,² for this was inappropriate. Thus it is a word of counsel, for in the face of death sober sorrow, not sobbing sorrow, should characterize even those who have suffered the loss. Reality has to be faced; decisions must be made; duties must be discharged; therefore, "Stop sobbing."

To the dead boy the Lord immediately turned and said: "Arise." Since the Jews did not use coffins because they did not bury bodies in the ground but in rock-hewn chambers (II Sam. 3:21), the Lord spoke directly to the body which was wrapped and laid on a funeral couch.

In every instance of resurrection it was or will be the voice of Christ which calls the dead back to life. Those who were restored during the earthly ministry of the Lord were so raised (Lk. 8:54; John 11:43), and in the future we are told that "the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God" and "all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth" (John 5:25, 28-29).

It is almost as if no special display of power is required on the part of Christ to raise the dead—just the audible expression of power which is inherently resident in the Prince of Life. There will be no escape in that future day when His

²The word *klaiein* is used in verse 13, which means *loud sobbing*. *Dakruen*, which means *quiet weeping*, is not employed here.

voice sounds. For those who believe, it will be a sound of victory; for those who do not, it will be the call to judgment and everlasting torment.

3. Christ Is Conquering (Lk. 7:15-16)

Death was conquered. The victory was won. The proof was there for all to see, for the boy sat up and began to speak. No one in the crowd could question the reality or validity of the miracle, but all had to react to what had taken place. The general reaction was one of fear, which caused the people to begin to glorify God for what they had seen. There is nothing improper about the reaction of fear, but in this case it did not take the people far enough, for they only saw in the Saviour a Prophet.

Again there is nothing wrong with recognizing Christ as a Prophet, but alone it is insufficient. He must also be seen and received as the divine Saviour. Only then can there be the certain hope of resurrection, not unto earthly life again, as in this case, but unto eternal life. The miracle was great, but the effect on the people was inadequate. The proof was more than sufficient, but hearts were insensitive. The Prince of Life can conquer death with a word, but the human heart can still refuse to let Him come in.

Save Thee, O Lord, I have no God at all,
 I trust upon Thy goodness and Thy might,
 Thou art my Tower of strength and brazen wall,
 To whom I fly now dangers me affright;
 I build my confidence on Thee alone,
 God able to relieve in greatest needs;
 O let Thy will and power conjoin in one,
 To wash away the guilt of my misdeeds.
 Turn not away Thy favorable face,
 Because I merit not to have Thy favor,
 But let me taste of thine abundant grace,
 For the dear merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour,
 Who gave Himself to death on this condition,
 That they which trust in Him might have remission.

—*Sixteenth Century Poem, first printed in 1846.*