

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #33: “JESUS: THE MAN WHO BROKE UP FUNERALS”

By John Temples

We know Jesus by many names and descriptive titles:

- The Lord
- The Savior
- The Son of God
- The Son of Man
- The Great Physician
- The Light of the World
- The Messiah

I propose to add a new title by which to describe our Lord: **the Man who broke up funerals.**

Everything about Jesus was LIFE. Consider these startling facts:

- He preached many sermons, but never preached a funeral sermon.
- No one ever died in the presence of Jesus, and not one person who was dead remained dead in His presence. Even the thieves on the cross died after He did.
- Every funeral that Jesus ever attended resulted in a resurrection. He raised a widow's son from the dead in the city of Nain (Luke 7). He raised the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5). He raised His friend Lazarus (John 11).

THE FUNERAL OF THE WIDOW'S SON

Here is the account from Luke 7:11-16: "...He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When

the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, Do not weep. Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say to you, arise. So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, A great prophet has risen up among us; and, God has visited His people."

This was an especially sad funeral. The man who had died was an only son. That meant her mother would be a "widow indeed," with no one to care for her.

When Jesus encountered the funeral procession, He told the woman not to weep. Would you walk up to a grieving widow in the midst of a funeral and tell her to stop crying?

Then, having stopped the funeral procession, Jesus touched the open coffin (verse 14). In all likelihood, He touched the body of the young man.

There would have been a gasp from the crowd. First, because it was a terrible breach of protocol. Second, because any person who touched a dead body, or the bier on which the body was carried, immediately became ceremonially defiled.¹

The Gospels do not record that Jesus was ever personally defiled, or that He underwent any form of ritual purification. How could Jesus touch a dead body and not be unclean? One possible answer might be that Jesus, by virtue of being God, had *intrinsic* power over death. Others who raised people from the dead (Elijah, Elisha, Peter, Paul) had only *imputed* power. Jesus could not be contaminated by death, either ritually or physically. Power flowed in only one direction where He was concerned!

THE FUNERAL OF THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS

Jairus, a synagogue ruler, came to Jesus and begged Him to come and heal his dying daughter. While they were on the way, messengers came and announced

¹ "He who touches the dead body of anyone shall be unclean seven days.... Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain by a sword or who has died, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days" (Numbers 19:11, 16).

that she had died. When they came to the house, they found a large and noisy crowd (hired mourners).

Jesus basically told them to get lost.

Mark 5:40-43 says, "When He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him [Peter, James, and John—v 37] and entered where the child was lying. Then He took the child by the hand and said to her, Talitha, cumi, which is translated, Little girl, I say to you, arise." She rose immediately at the command of Jesus.

Something unusual about this resurrection is that Jesus allowed only five people to directly witness it, and He gave strict orders for them not to speak publicly about it. Why did He do that? Because He did not want the miracle to attract people to Him for the wrong reason, perhaps; also, there was a divine timetable for the revealing of Jesus as the Son of God, and this was not the time.

The little girl not only came back to life, but she was healed of her sickness--she was able to get up, walk, and eat. When Jesus healed a person, the results were immediate and complete; that person didn't just "start to get better"!

THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS

The record is found in John 11.

This resurrection was intensely personal for the Lord; He had spent much time in the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. This was also the most hostile crowd Jesus had faced when performing miracles. The Jewish leaders were there, and were already plotting the death of Jesus. Jesus would give them something that would force them to either put up or shut up--either admit that He was God or be completely hardened and in utter denial. Unfortunately, they chose the latter.

There is a famous passage associated with this resurrection. It is the shortest verse in the Bible, John 11:35, which says "Jesus wept."

Why did He weep? Well, the death of a loved one usually invokes tears. But there was something more. Lazarus was finally at peace in Paradise, yet he was about to be called back to this sin-filled world. Burton Coffman says, "Our Lord was about to call back to our world of temptation and sin a valiant soldier who had already won the crown of life; and in such a thing, there was an undeniable danger to the soul of Lazarus. The prospect of Lazarus again facing life with its inevitable dangers to the soul, and particularly with the additional burden that would be imposed by his resurrection (for the Pharisees would try to kill him)—all such considerations are of such profound weight that they may be rightly viewed as plunging the Son of God into tears as he thought of them."

Let us notice some things that were common to all of these resurrections:

In each of the resurrections, there was ample evidence that the deceased was truly dead. Skeptics could have (and do today) say, "Oh, they weren't really dead; they had just fainted, or were in a coma, etc." Any doubts about the state of the dead person were providentially removed in these cases. The widow's son was on the way to the cemetery; no doubt his body had been handled and wrapped by loved ones who would have reacted immediately to any signs of life. There were many people present at the home of Jairus, who was a prominent person; they would not have brought word to him of his daughter's death unless they were certain. Lazarus had been dead for four days, and his body had begun to decompose, so there could be no doubt in that case.

In each of these cases, there were a sufficient number of people present to witness and vouch for the resurrection. The raising of the widow's son was seen by "a large crowd" (Luke 7:12). The resurrection of the daughter of Jairus was witnessed personally by five individuals. (The Law of Moses required only two or three witnesses to establish the truth of a matter.) There were large numbers of people present to see the raising of Lazarus, including his closest relatives.

In each case, the person who was raised immediately did things that absolutely proved they were alive and completely whole. The widow's son sat up and spoke. The daughter of Jairus walked and ate. Lazarus came forth from the grave under his own power. These were not gradual recoveries--these people didn't "flutter

their eyelids” and gradually come out of a coma. They were immediately in possession of all their faculties. All of these are marks of a true miracle.

In each case, Jesus raised the dead merely by commanding it--speaking it and willing it to be done. There were three resurrections by prophets in the Old Testament, but in none of these cases did the dead come back to life merely by being spoken to. The resurrections of Jesus were in a class all its own. He was more than a prophet; He was (is) the Son of God.

In each case, Jesus addressed the dead person directly and specifically. “Young man, I say to you, arise” (Luke 7:14). “Little girl, I say to you, arise” (Mark 5:41). “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43).

I believe there is a reason for this. John 5:28-29 says, “The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” If Jesus had just said, “Come forth,” there would have been a premature general resurrection--every single dead person in the world would have arisen!

In each case, the resurrected person said nothing about their death experience. Surely we, and the people who witnessed these things, would like to know what they heard and saw while dead. But God wants us to live in one world at a time. He even forbade Paul from uttering anything about what he saw and experienced in Paradise and heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-4).

Yes, Jesus was truly “the Man who broke up funerals.” And the wonderful lesson for us today is that when Jesus once again comes to the world, you and I will not stay dead either. It is impossible to die, or to stay dead, in the presence of Jesus! Truly, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of all men” (John 1:4). --John
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