

A FUNERAL IN NAIN

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All of us have attended funerals, perhaps even accompanied the casket to the cemetery. But none of us has been to a funeral where the deceased sat up. It did happen once, long ago. We know where, though we do not know his name and, were it not for Dr. Luke, we would not know about it at all, since he is the only writer to record it (in Luke 7:11-17).

Verse 11 brings a **crowd**, tagging along with Jesus and his disciples on the way to Nain, a town not elsewhere mentioned. It was in Galilee, probably along a road from Capernaum to Jerusalem. What was it about this carpenter's son from Nazareth (a town of no reputation) that caused a crowd to follow him? Since the crowd is distinguished from the disciples, we might question their motives. Were they following just to be part of what was going on? Were they hoping to see some great sight? Were they bored, with nothing better to do? Were they truly interested in Jesus? What of us? Are we Christ-followers, or crowd-followers?

Verse 12 reveals a solemn **ceremony**. A dead man is being carried out of Nain (Jewish custom forbade burying within city limits). The mother of the deceased was already a widow, so her grief must have been acute. This was her only son. Her financial situation might now be precarious, indeed, with neither husband nor son to depend on. It speaks well of the townsfolk of Nain that a considerable crowd followed the funeral procession. Thus, two crowds met—one headed toward town and another coming out of it. Coincidence? Since God knew what would happen, and that Luke would record it, and that we would study it, surely more than mere chance was involved in the fateful meeting. But it reminds us life is fragile, and brief, and sometimes parents outlive their children.

Verse 13 shows Jesus' **compassion**, as he singles out the grieving mother, telling her "do not weep." There is no hint they had met before, or knew each other, or even that they are introduced on this occasion. Jesus tells her not to weep, but without explaining what is about to happen. He tells her not to weep while her son is still very much dead. Are we aware of the grieving? Can we, like Jesus, single out those in need of compassion?

Verse 14 finds the Lord issuing a **command**. Interrupting the funeral, Jesus touches the bier and the procession comes to a standstill. Jesus does not direct his words to the disciples, or to the crowd, or to the mother, or even to his Father in heaven. He speaks to the young man: "I say to you, arise." Anyone can talk to the dead. But, when Jesus speaks, the dead actually listen.

Verse 15 tells of the incredible **cure**, as the formerly dead man sits up and starts talking. How could it be otherwise? A corpse can no more resist a divine command than could a storm on the sea of Galilee. In point of fact, the only ones capable of refusing God's orders are living humans. Such is the sobering and remarkable power of free will that each of us has. Jesus turns the young man over to his mother. Just think of the conversations those two had later. Surely, were they still alive when the church began, this widow and her resurrected son would have been among the earliest Christians.

Verse 16 records the **conclusion** reached by the crowds. Glorifying God, they inferred that Jesus was a "great prophet" and that "God has visited his people!" Both counts were right, though the people could have gone further, since Jesus was much more than a prophet—he was Immanuel (literally, "God with us"). And, not only had God visited by way a miraculous healing, but God was actually standing there among the crowd in the person of Jesus (if only

they would see it). The people's assertion that Jesus was a divine messenger would have been more on target had they said he was their Messiah. At least the people attributed what happened to God. How many today grow up in a sea of blessings, but never think to glorify God for them?

Verse 17 indicates the ***circulation*** of a report about Jesus. How could a lid be kept on such news? It spread like wildfire through Judea and vicinity. And this was just one miracle. Recalling that John said Jesus' miracles were too numerous to chronicle (cf. John 21:25), can you imagine all the reports that went out, and all the conversations that must have taken place about Jesus? It must have been impossible to live in Palestine and not hear about Jesus. Truly, the report about him is still circulating, and has spanned two millennia to reach our own ears.

There is no discussion about sin in this story (contrast Matt. 9:5). There is no mention of faith in this story (contrast Matt. 9:22). There is no request made of Jesus (contrast Luke 7:3). And, refreshingly, there is no criticism of Jesus (contrast Luke 13:14). Instead, Jesus, himself, takes the initiative and the whole account seems to rest on the twin pillars of his compassion and his power. It was an unforgettable day in Nain when there began a funeral that could not be completed!