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## SERMON X.

### THE WIDOW'S SON RESTORED TO LIFE.

ST. LUKE VII. 14, 15.

“He came and touched the bier, and they that bare him, stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead, sat up, and began to speak: and he delivered him to his mother.”

WE often say that nothing teaches like affliction. But affliction is not our only teacher. Mercy instructs, as well as sorrow. Indeed it is only when it leads to mercy, when it shows us our need of mercy and makes us seek it, that sorrow does us any lasting good. The grand means which the Holy Ghost employs to relieve and bless wretched man, is love, a discovery of the abounding grace of God in Jesus Christ. It follows therefore, that signal mercies have lessons for us, as well as signal calamities. Their errand is not done when they have gladdened us; no, nor even when they have warmed our hearts with thankfulness. They are teachers sent from heaven, and, like afflictions, they will bear witness either for or against us at the judgment-seat of God.

A woman in deep affliction had arrested the notice of our Lord. She was a widow, and at the time he saw her, she was following to the grave an only son. His soul was moved with her misery. He paused for a moment to address to her two short words of kindness; and then followed one of the most extraordinary displays of mercy, that ever brought glory to the living God. It is described in the text with admirable simplicity and force. So great indeed is the beauty of the apostle's narrative, that we are in danger of forgetting, in our admiration of it, that it was written for our instruction.

The subject which it offers for our meditation, is the relief which this distressed woman received in her affliction. We may consider this in five points of view—the time when she obtained it, the manner in which it was given her, the power which wrought it, the love which was displayed in its communication, and the effects which it produced in those who witnessed it.

I. Consider the time when her relief came. It was a time when she least expected it.

None but a parent can tell how hope clings to a parent's heart. A few days ago a word of kindness from Christ, or even his presence, would perhaps have made this woman eager with expectation. He had healed many that were sick; with what imploring earnestness would she have besought him to heal her son! But now her case seemed hopeless. Her son was dead. His grave-clothes were wrapped around him. The gate of the city was past. In another

hour he would be closed up in his tomb. We accordingly find her silent; grateful perhaps for the pity shown her by this strange Comforter, but neither imploring nor expecting his aid.

Learn here then this lesson—Never think your case desperate; never deem yourselves beyond the reach of help.

Some of us greatly need this caution. No sooner does grief come to us, than despair comes with it. We no more expect relief, than we expect the sun at midnight. But what does this history say? What do a thousand histories tell us? It is never too late for Christ to help us. On this side of eternity, not a spot can be found nor a situation thought of, where man need despair. There is no guilt which may not be pardoned, no evil which may not be cured, no darkness which may not be turned into light and joy. Indeed relief is generally the nearest to us, when our case appears the most desperate. It is God's way to delay his help, till all hope from every other source is gone.

No situation could be more perilous than that of Israel in their departure from Egypt. Their destruction seemed inevitable. On one side of them rose Pihahiroth, a range of lofty cliffs; on the other side were the forts and garrisons of the Egyptians. Before them was a roaring sea; behind them, the enraged Pharaoh with his army and chariots. This helpless people gave themselves up to despair one hour, and saw in the next the salvation of God. Before another day had well begun their enemies were overwhelmed in the waters, while they themselves were making the shore resound with their song of deliverance.

Lazarus of Bethany was sick. His sisters sent to Jesus a most touching message; "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." But Jesus hastened not to his friend; "he abode two days still in the same place where he was." Lazarus died, and then at last said the Saviour, "I go." He went, and the buried Lazarus lived.

Even when his aid is earnestly sought, it is often for a time denied. It lingers; the wheels of his chariot tarry. Nay, while we are on our knees before him, our situation may become darker, and our affliction heavier. Jairus had an only daughter. Like many an only child, she was struck by God. Her father trembled for her life. He flies in his anguish to Christ. He falls down at his feet, and "beseeches him greatly to come and lay his hands on his little daughter, that she may live." Jesus goes with him, but he moves not with a father's haste. He stops in his way to commend the faith of another sufferer, and while poor Jairus hears a healed woman bless him, his rising hopes are at once destroyed. There came one from his house, which said, "Thy daughter is dead." She was dead; and yet this very child, ere another hour had past, breathed and moved. "Her spirit came again, and she arose."

And why does the Lord act thus? For wise and gracious ends—to call us off from earthly confidence and lying refuges, to bring down the pride of our

rebellious hearts, to lay us in conscious littleness and helplessness at his feet, to make us glorify his matchless wisdom when our deliverance comes.

He has often too the very same ends in view, in the mode which he adopts to help us.

II. Observe the manner in which, in this instance, his aid was given. It came from a Being from whom nothing was expected, and in a way of which this afflicted woman never thought. If she thought at all of comfort, she looked for it perhaps only in death, in joining her husband and her son, in going to them who could not come to her. Not one in all the multitude around her, expected Jesus of Nazareth to be her Comforter, much less her lost son to rise up from the dead to dry her tears.

Signal mercies seldom reach us in the way we look for them. The Lord generally draws near to us in an unexpected manner, as well as at an unexpected time. Israel, in the desert, were perishing with hunger; their food came from the clouds. They were dying with thirst; "he brought them forth water out of the rock of flint." And think of that greatest of all Jehovah's doings, the redemption of his church. Had men and angels sat in council to devise a plan by which lost sinners might be saved, could it ever have entered into their hearts to conceive of the incarnation of the Son of God? of bringing him from the bosom of his Father, and placing him in degradation and misery in such a world as this? And how have our own best mercies come? And how are they daily coming? Not from the friends on whom we have most depended; not through the channels which we have thought must bring them. No. All these have again and again failed us. They have been sent us by means of which we never dreamed. They have come in a way which has filled us with wonder, while it has shown us the hand and amazing greatness of our God.

III. Consider now *the power* manifested in the case before us.

In order to form a correct idea of this affecting scene, we must recollect that the mode of burial among the Jews was not precisely the same as among ourselves. The dead were not shut out from sight, when they were carried to the tomb. Their bodies were carefully wrapped in linen, and then laid on an open bier. Thus after the resurrection of our Lord, we are told of the linen clothes and napkin that were left in his forsaken sepulchre, but not a word is said of any coffin. There was none.

And it is of importance, in the instance before us, to bear this circumstance in mind. It proves this young man to be actually dead. The multitude saw him dead. His restoration to life was therefore a real, and not a pretended miracle.

Behold the Saviour then turning from the weeping mother to the corpse of her son. "He came and touched the bier." Awed by that countenance before which the earth and the heavens will one day flee away, "they that bare him, stood still." For a moment all is suspense and wonder; and then this compassionate Man takes on himself the majesty and authority of God. "By his word the heavens were made," and now by the breath of his mouth he controls the dead. The silent multitude hear the command go forth, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise;" and before their wondering eyes, the dead obeys. Whence the spirit came, we know not; in a moment it was there, entering and animating its former clay. "He that was dead, sat up, and began to speak." And what were his words? It is useless to ask. Let us rather enquire what ought to be our own. Are they not these, "Verily this man was the Son of God?"

1. We have before us *a signal proof of the Redeemer's Godhead.*

Others have raised the dead; but they have done so by means which plainly declared that the power they exercised, was not their own. Elijah, we are told, "cried unto the Lord" at Zarephath. Elisha "prayed unto the Lord," when he restored to the Shunamite her son. Peter "kneeled down and prayed," before he said to Tabitha, "Arise." Our Lord, on the contrary, acts like one who needs no assistance, who knows no limits to his power. He commands, and is obeyed; he speaks, and it is done. A word brings Lazarus from his sepulchre; a word raises this widow's son from his bier. Where is the mortal man who could thus perform such a work as this? Where is the angel who would dare attempt it? The power which accomplished it, is the same which breathed into man at first the breath of life. The Being who exercised it, is the mighty God. And what follows?

2. A second fact of which this miracle reminds us—*the ability of Christ to raise all the dead.*

Nothing but omnipotence could restore life to one dead body; omnipotence can quicken whom it will. He who raised one, can raise a thousand, can raise a world. He can raise us. Look forward. When a few more years are gone, we shall all be in the situation of this young man; we shall be dead. Not a man of us will breathe the air or see the sun. Our friends will carry us out of the houses we now inhabit. We shall be left alone in the ground. And what will become of us there? We shall see corruption. This breathing clay, these bodies which we love so well, will be as the clods which cover them, vile earth and dust. And what if it be so? He that said to a sorrowful mother, "Weep not," says to his dying saints, "Fear not. I am he that liveth and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore; amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." If, when we die, we "die in the Lord," this is the promise he gives us to take with us to our graves, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. I will raise him up at the last day." The same

voice that reached this widow's son on his bier, can reach us in our beds of dust. It will be as powerful around this church, as in the gate of Nain. We ourselves shall hear it. We shall come forth and live.

3. We may discover also here *the power of Christ over the human soul*. When it has left the body, he can recall it at his will from its unknown abode. He can therefore reach it and control it while in the flesh. If he can by a word restore natural life, he can surely with as much ease restore spiritual life also.

Our souls are dead, brethren. Their spiritual and better life is gone; they are "alienated from the life of God;" they are "dead in trespasses and sins." The scripture tells us so. It discovers to us also the evil and danger of this state. It assures us that before we can see God, we must be raised out of it; we must experience within us a change as real and great, as the reanimation of a corpse. And how is this great change to be accomplished? Only by "the working of that mighty power" which can raise the dead. If then any of you are mourning over your own dead souls, Christ is your life. Neither men nor angels can help you; but this is your consolation, that he who said to this young man, "Arise," can work in you both "to will and to do of his good pleasure."

But you are mourning perhaps over the souls of others. While the sons and daughters of your neighbours go down to the grave, your own live before you, but they are not alive unto God. Their state is a grief and terror to you. Often does it force from you the cry of the supplicating patriarch, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" This miracle shows you in whom your hope lies. And in whom would you wish it to lie, rather than in him? Send your thoughts round all the beings you have ever seen or heard of—is there one among them all, of whom you would seek spiritual life for your child, rather than of this compassionate, this mighty Restorer of the dead? Invoke his aid. Expect it. Disquiet not yourselves because it is delayed, "In the evening time, it shall be light." In an unexpected hour the prodigal may come to himself. He may fill your house and your heart with joy. You may say concerning him, "It is meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

IV. But this miracle was not an act of mere greatness; it was also *a display of love*.

Often in the course of his ministry, our persecuted Lord was called on to assert his dignity by the exercise of his mighty power. Satan tempted him to prove it by commanding stones to be made bread; the Jewish rulers asked a sign from him; Herod "hoped to have seen some miracle done by him." He refused them all. He stood before his enemies, in appearance, powerless as themselves. But when this helpless widow wept before him, the glory of his

Godhead burst forth; he manifested his power in an act “to which none of the sons of the mighty” can approach.

And mark the tenderness of his love. This young man was now a living monument of his omnipotence, a proof of his divine authority, which none could gainsay or resist. We might have expected therefore, that he would say to him, as he had said to others, “Follow me.” But no. He thought more of this widow’s comfort than of his own honour; “he delivered him to his mother.”

What a scene was here! A son, but a moment ago a senseless corpse, alive in his mother’s arms—a multitude dumb and motionless with wonder—the Man who had wrought this change, unmoved, calm; looking with delight for a moment on the joy he had spread around him, and then passing away from it, like one who had higher and greater works to accomplish. We cannot conceive aright of such a scene. We need not. We may however see in it *the approbation with which relative affection, the love of one relation to another, is viewed by Christ.*

Our Lord never raised more than three persons from the dead. One was the only daughter of Jairus; another, the only brother of Martha and Mary; the third, the only son of his mother. And he raised them all in compassion to those who loved and wept for them. How could he say to parents and children, to brothers and sisters, how could he say to us all in stronger terms, “Love one another?” How can we wish for mercies for our living children, and not seek them of him? How can we mourn for the dead, and not remember that he pities us? How can we hear of tenderness, and not think of Jesus Christ?

V. *The effect* produced by this miracle was great. Nothing indeed is told us of the future conduct of the mother and her son. We may trust that the hour of their re-union was the beginning of a new life of praise. Could we look into heaven, we should doubtless see them at the feet of their mighty Lord, ascribing, not power and love only, but salvation to his name.

The surrounding multitudes were, for a time at least, deeply impressed. And here the Holy Spirit is not silent. The sensation excited among them, and the very words they uttered, are recorded. And this probably to teach us that *the mercies we witness are designed to affect us*, as well as the mercies we receive.

Our neighbours rejoice; we rejoice with them; but do we try to make the things which gladden them, testify to us of Christ? Do we hear him speaking to ourselves in them? Some of us perhaps might almost answer, “Never.” We seldom think of going to the house of joy and health for instruction. Perhaps we love the house of mourning better. There may be something in the emotions it raises, and in the lessons it conveys, more in unison with our daily

thoughts. This is not indeed a common state of mind. It is well that it is not; it is not a happy state. That is the holiest heart, which dwells the most on the love of Christ, which prompts the tongue to sing of mercy oftener than of judgment, which looks for its Lord in the hourly discoveries of his goodness, as well as in the strokes of his wrath.

But what are the particular fruits which the sight of extraordinary mercies should produce in us? They are the same as were produced in the spectators of this miracle at Nain—an abasing and reverential sense of the divine presence, exalted views of Christ, an open profession of our faith in him, a thankful acknowledgment of his goodness and truth, a hope in his mercy. “There came a fear on all; and they glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us, and that God hath visited his people.”

Need I tell you, brethren, that it would be happy for you, if mercy never entered your houses or your hearts, never even came within your sight, without bringing forth such effects as these? Let me rather strive to leave impressed on you a few practical reflections, which the things you have heard are calculated to enforce.

*How strange is it that any of the afflicted should he backward to apply to Jesus Christ for relief!* What have we now seen in him? The compassion of a man, the most loving kindness of which our nature is capable, the tenderest mercy.

But compassion, you say, will not meet your case; you need something more than pity. There is in Christ something more. We see in him the power of the everlasting God. He can help you in all difficulties, give you a happy issue out of all afflictions, take off from you the burden of any griefs or any sins.

Perhaps you doubt this truth. You may be saying in your hearts, “There may be hope for others, but there is none for me. My misery will admit of no relief. My friend is gone. My child is taken from me. No miracle now rouses the slumbering dead; and how shall I be comforted? Nothing is left for the desolate, but to humble themselves, to mourn and die.” O what a sinful limiting of the power of God is here! Who gave you at first the comforts you have lost? The Lord gave them. Were they all the comforts he had to give? Is he so poor, that he must fetch them out of their graves, or leave you wretched? Can an arm of flesh, can dust and ashes, be necessary for the peace of that heart, with which he who fills a crowded heaven with blessedness, can do whatsoever he will? True, he will not now raise the dead. He needs them not. He can make you happier without them, than he ever made you with them. He can put himself in the place of departed friends. Without the aid of a single creature, he can give you a peace which the loss of all that is dear to you could not destroy, nor the opening of all the graves which were ever closed, increase.

*Of how vast importance is it to us all to secure the friendship of this great Saviour!* In one sense, it is already ours. There is not a sinner staining the earth with his crimes, to whom the Son of God does not prove himself a friend. But amidst the compassion towards us which fills his heart, there is a love of his Father's law, a love of holiness, stronger than it all. He might have saved a ruined world without a pang or groan. Who could have controlled his mercy? But no. Rather than sin should be esteemed a trifle, he took on him our form, he stood in our world, "he gave his back to the smiters," he bled and died.

This fearful hatred of sin, this awful regard to justice, was as strong when he took our nature with him into heaven, as when he reigned there only in his own. Behold him weeping over the approaching miseries of Jerusalem. Never before was there in any human heart such strong compassion as that which poured forth those tears. But mark—the threatened miseries came. Before fifty years had past, the Jews were vagabonds on the earth, and Jerusalem was a heap of ruins.

Deceive not yourselves then. There is wrath in Christ, as well as compassion; a power to destroy, as great as his power to save; a voice which can say, not only, "Weep not," but, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."

How stands the case with you, brethren? Are you the friends or the enemies of this almighty Jesus? You are now the objects of his compassion; can he show forth the riches of his grace in you, when he comes to judge the world? Have you fled to him for deliverance from the curse of a broken law? Do you know that without him, your soul is lost and dead? no more able to quicken and save itself, than this dead man was able to raise up himself and live? Is Christ your refuge, your hope, your all in all? No? Then you will one day learn that he who can turn sorrow into joy, can also turn the little joy that mercy has left you, into the bitterest anguish. "There came a fear on all," when he declared his mighty power in showing mercy and pity; what will be that fear which will shake the world, when he shall be revealed in the greatness of his strength, taking vengeance? It will force you to say to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?"

Do you tremble at the prospect of his wrath? Does it appear to you a real and fearful evil? Then draw from this history one reflection more—*With what confidence may the mourning penitent flee for salvation to the Lord Jesus Christ!* This is the inference which St. Paul draws from the contemplation of his great compassion. "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain"—what? Pity, comfort, help? No—"that we may obtain mercy," the mercy which we need more than we need any other mercy, mercy for our souls, salvation.

He whom this history proclaims to be so willing to save the heart from the light sorrows of this present time, is far more willing to redeem the soul from the bitter and lasting pains of eternity. He had compassion on a mother as she was weeping for an only son; will he not have compassion on you who are trembling for a soul, your only soul, the soul which once lost, is lost for ever? He helped her unasked; not a cry nor a prayer came from her; will he refuse to help you when you implore his mercy? Hear his own promise; "Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find." Hear his own complaint; "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." Hear the record of a prophet and an apostle; "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved." "Call ye then upon him while he is near." Approach him as one that has promised you mercy, as one that is seated on a throne of grace for the express purpose of showing mercy, as one that "delighteth in mercy." Glorify him by embracing his promises, by laying hold by faith on his great salvation. "This is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life." Seek life at his hands; expect it; not such a life as this dead youth received, a few feverish years polluted with the sins of earth, darkened by sorrows, and ending in corruption; but a life of "glory, honour, and immortality;" a life like the Redeemer's own, incorruptible and undefiled, quiet as the heavens, and secure as the throne of God.