EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS.

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
*And Many Explanatory Notes*.

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LUKE VII. 11–17.

11. And it came to pass the day af­ter, that he went into a city called Nain: and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.

12. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.

13. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

14. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.

15. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.

16. And 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.

17. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judæa, and throughout all the region round about.

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The wondrous event described in these verses, is only recorded in St. Luke’s Gospel. It is one of the three great instances of our Lord restoring a dead person to life, and, like the raising of Lazarus and the ruler’s daughter, is rightly regarded as one of the greatest miracles which He wrought on earth. In all three cases, we see an exercise of divine power. In each we see a comfortable proof that the Prince of Peace is stronger than the king of terrors, and that though death, the last enemy, is mighty, he is not so mighty as the sinner’s Friend.

We learn from these verses, what sorrow sin has brought into the world. We are told of a funeral at Nain. All funerals are mournful things, but it is difficult to imagine a funeral more mournful than the one here described. It was the funeral of a young man, and that young man the only son of his mother, and that mother a widow. There is not an item in the whole story, which is not full of misery. And all this misery, be it remembered, was brought into the world by sin. God did not create it at the beginning, when He made all things “very good.” Sin is the cause of it all. “Sin entered into the world” when Adam fell, “and death by sin.” (Rom. v. 12.)

Let us never forget this great truth. The world around us is full of sorrow. Sickness, and pain, and infirmity, and poverty, and labour, and trouble, abound on every side. From one end of the world to the other, the history of families is full of lamentation, and weep­ing, and mourning, and woe. And whence does it all come? Sin is the fountain and root to which all must be traced. There would neither have been tears, nor cares, nor illness, nor deaths, nor funerals in the earth, if there had been no sin. We must bear this state of things patiently. We cannot alter it. We may thank God that there is a remedy in the Gospel, and that this life is not all. But in the meantime, let us lay the blame at the right door. Let us lay the blame on sin.

How much we ought to hate sin! Instead of loving it, cleaving to it, dallying with it, excusing it, playing with it, we ought to hate it with a deadly hatred. Sin is the great murderer, and thief, and pestilence, and nuisance of this world. Let us make no peace with it. Let us wage a ceaseless warfare against it. It is “the abominable thing which God hateth.” Happy is he who is of one mind with God, and can say, I “abhor that which is evil.” (Rom. xii. 9.)

We learn, secondly, from these verses, how deep is the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ’s heart. We see this beautifully brought out in His behaviour at this funeral in Nain. He meets the mournful procession, accompanying the young man to his grave, and is moved with compassion at the sight. He waits not to be applied to for help. His help appears to have been neither asked for nor expected. He saw the weeping mother, and knew well what her feelings must have been, for He had been born of a woman Himself. At once He addressed her with words alike startling and touching:—He “said unto her, Weep not.”—A few more seconds, and the meaning of His words became plain. The widow’s son was restored to her alive. Her darkness was turned into light, and her sorrow into joy.

Our Lord Jesus Christ never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. His heart is still as compassionate as when He was upon earth. His sym­pathy with sufferers is still as strong. Let us bear this in mind, and take comfort in it. There is no friend or comforter who can be compared to Christ. In all our days of darkness, which must needs be many, let us first turn for consolation to Jesus the Son of God. He will never fail us, never disappoint us, never refuse to take interest in our sorrows. He lives, who made the widow’s heart sing for joy in the gate of Nain. He lives, to receive all labouring and heavy-laden ones, if they will only come to Him by faith. He lives, to heal the broken-hearted, and be a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. And He lives to do greater things than these one day. He lives to come again to His people, that they may weep no more at all, and that all tears may be wiped from their eyes.

We learn, lastly, from these verses, the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can ask no proof of this more striking than the miracle which we are now con­sidering. He gives back life to a dead man with a few words. He speaks to a cold corpse, and at once it becomes a living person. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the heart, the lungs, the brain, the senses, again resume their work and discharge their duty. “Young man,” He cried, “I say unto thee arise.” That voice was a voice mighty in operation. At once “he that was dead sat up and began to speak.”

Let us see in this mighty miracle a pledge of that solemn event, the general resurrection. That same Jesus who here raised one dead person, shall raise all mankind at the last day. “The hour cometh in the which all that are in the grave shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damna­tion.” (John v. 28, 29.) When the trumpet sounds and Christ commands, there can be no refusal or escape. All must appear before His bar in their bodies. And all shall be judged according to their works.

Let us see, furthermore, in this mighty miracle, a lively emblem of Christ’s power to quicken the dead in sins. In Him is life. He quickeneth whom He will. (John v. 21.) He can raise to a new life souls that now seem dead in worldliness and sin. He can say to hearts that now appear corrupt and lifeless, “Arise to repentance, and live to the service of God.” Let us never despair of any soul. Let us pray for our children, and faint not. Our young men and our young women may long seem travell­ing on the way to ruin. But let us pray on. Who can tell but He that met the funeral in the gates of Nain may yet meet our unconverted children, and say with almighty power, “Young man, arise.” With Christ nothing is impossible.

Let us leave the passage with a solemn recollection of those things which are yet to happen at the last day. We read that “there came a fear on all,” at Nain, when the young man was raised. What then shall be the feelings of mankind when all the dead are raised at once? The unconverted man may well fear that day. He is not prepared to meet God.—But the true Christian has nothing to fear. He may lay him down and sleep peacefully in his grave. In Christ He is complete and safe, and when he rises again he shall see God’s face in peace.

Notes. Luke VII. 11–17.

11.—[The day after.] It would appear from this expression, that the miracle recorded in these verses, was the first instance of our Lord raising a dead person to life. The daughter of Jairus was the second instance, and Lazarus the third. This order of the three miracles is disputed by some. But the internal evidence in favour of it, seems too strong to be put aside. Remembering this, we may understand the sensation that the miracle would create among all Jews who heard of it. No person had been raised from the dead, since the days of Elisha, a period of nine hundred years.

[A city called Nain.]This place is nowhere else mentioned in the Bible. It is a small town on the northern slope of the lesser Mount Hermon, of which the ruins and the name re­main to the present day. Mr. Burgon says, that an ancient burying place is even now distinguishable at the lower part of the hill, not far from the ruins.

12.—[A dead man carried out.] Let us note that the place of burial was outside the city. It is curious to observe how strongly almost all commentators dwell on this point, and urge the impropriety of the practice of burying the dead in church yards, and among the living.

[Much people...was with her.] This expression should not be overlooked. It shows the publicity of the great miracle here recorded. It was wrought before many witnesses.

13.—[When the Lord saw her He had compassion.] Poole’s remarks on this expression are worth reading: “None moved our Lord on behalf of the widow, neither do we read that she herself spake to Him. But our Saviour’s bowels were moved at the sight of her sorrows, and consideration of her loss. It is ob­servable that our Saviour wrought His healing miracles, 1, sometimes at the motion and desire of the parties to be healed; 2, sometimes at the desire of others on their behalf; 3, some­times of His own free motion, neither themselves nor others soliciting Him for any such mercies toward them.”—The leper was healed (Luke v. 12,) in reply to his own personal applica­tion;—the centurion’s servant, (Luke vii. 1,) in reply to the prayer of his master,—and the widow’s son was raised without any one interceding on his behalf.

14. —[The bier.] The Greek word so translated, is only found here in the New Testament. It would not have been correct to trans­late it “coffin.” The practice of burying in coffins was apparently unknown among the Jews. In the case before us, the young man’s body probably laid on a sort of couch. In Bonar’s travels in Palestine, he describes a funeral which he saw, and says that the bier was like “a large cradle.”

[*I* say unto thee arise.]We should carefully note the wide difference between our Lord’s manner of working miracles, and the manner in which they were worked by His prophets and apostles. There is an authority and divine power about the miracles recorded in the Gospels, which we do not see in the history of the other miracles in the Bible. Euthymius remarks, “Of old time indeed the prophet Elijah raised again the son of the widow of Sarepta, but by humbling himself before God, and supplication to Him. (1 Kings xvii. 20, 21.) So also the prophet Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite woman, but only after having stretched himself out upon his body. (2 Kings iv. 34, 35.) But Jesus only touching and commanding, at once raised the dead person.”

Burkitt remarks, “The Socinians here own that Christ raised this young man by a divine power, which God had communi­cated to Him, yet deny Him at the same time to be essentially God. But let them prove, if they can, that a divine power which is proper to God alone, ever was, or ever can, be commu­nicated to a creature, without the communication of the divine nature. True, we find Peter commanding Tabitha to arise, (Acts ix. 40,) but we find all he did was by faith in Christ, and by prayer unto Christ. But Christ here raised the widow’s son without prayer, purely by His own power; which undeniably proves Him to be God.”

15.—[Began to speak.] This fact is mentioned, in order to place it beyond doubt, that the young man was really restored to life. Where there is speech, there must be life.

Let it be observed, that we have no record given to us of any­thing that was ever said or thought by those who were miraculously raised from the dead. Their experience and knowledge are wisely withheld from us.

16.—[There came a fear.] This expression, and the rest of the verse, as well as the verse following, appear to furnish strong proof that this was the first instance of a dead person being restored to life by our Lord, during His ministry on earth.

[God hath visited His people.] This expression should be compared with Luke i. 68, and Luke i. 78, and with many places in the Old Testament—such as Ruth i. 6, 1 Sam. ii. 21, Job xxxv. 15, Jerem. vi. 6. It appears to signify any remarkable divine interposition, either in the way of mercy or of judgment, and does not necessarily signify, in this place, a personal visita­tion. That “God was manifest in the flesh,” when Christ became man for us, is an undeniable truth of Scripture. But it cannot be proved that it is taught in this text.