

The Dead Shall Rise: A City-Wide Prayer and Fasting Initiative (HCPN)

Motivated by Jesus's Compassion (Luke 7:11-17)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC English Service on March 23, 2025

Introduction

- ❖ Since the start of Lent, we've been in a sermon series called *The Dead Shall Rise*. It's something we're doing with around 150 other HCPN-affiliated churches across Houston. **Every week, we're preaching on another passage where God bares his strong arm and raises a dead person back to life.** The whole idea is to inspire you with these stories to pray heart-felt, faith-filled prayers to God to do it again. To bare his holy arm and to resurrect the spiritually dead back to life. During this Lenten season, we're praying and fasting for those far from God. We're praying for the lost to be found – for the dead to rise.

- ❖ We started with the first recorded instance in Scripture of the dead rising – when Elijah raised the widow of Zarephath's son. And last week, we studied the second instance, when the prophet Elisha raised the Shunammite woman's only son. This morning, we're in the NT to witness another prophet at work. In Luke 7, Jesus raises the only son of the widow of Nain.
 - **Now the continuity and connection between all three of these episodes is fairly obvious.** In each instance, there's a unnamed woman – only identified by her town and by her particular plight. Two of them are widows. Two of them have only one son. All three of them lose their sons to a tragic death. And in each instance, a man of God is there to perform a miracle. In each story, the dead is raised to life.
 - These connections were obvious to people in Jesus's day. Which is why they respond, in v16, saying, "*A great prophet has arisen among us!*" When they saw Jesus raise this dead man back to life, the stories of Elijah and Elisha immediately came to mind. This is another great prophet in our midst.

- ❖ Now, if you think about it, the OT prophets known for performing miracles were Elijah, Elisha, and before them, Moses. There are no miracles attributed to the other prophets. **But that's not an issue because what all OT prophets share in common is that they function as an earthly representation of God to God's people.** Usually through their speech. Beginning their messages with, "*Thus says the LORD.*" But whether it's through their words or their deeds, prophets represent God to God's people. In the OT, the normative means by which God's people saw his deeds and heard his voice is through his prophets.
 - **So if Jesus is this great prophet sent to God's people once more, then what does he reveal about God?** What does he represent? I have three considerations drawn from our text. (1) Jesus represents the gracious compassion of God. (2) He represents the resurrection power of God. And (3) he represents the abiding presence of God.

Jesus Represents the Gracious Compassion of God

- ❖ Let's start by considering how Jesus represents the gracious compassion of God. Just think about the position this woman is in. She's presented to us as a widow. So she's already survived her husband. She's already put him in the grave. Now our text begins with Jesus, entering the town of Nain, at the moment a funeral procession was passing through the town gate. And laid out on the funeral bier (an open coffin) was the dead corpse of the only son of that poor widow. Covered by a linen or cloth shroud. **She was on her way to bury her only begotten son** (that's literally what it says).

- ❖ You have to understand what a dire situation she was in. **In biblical times, the two most helpless groups in society were widows and orphans.** Because there was no social safety net available. There were no independent career opportunities for women and no orphanages to serve the fatherless. **So if you were a woman or child who lost her husband or father – you didn’t just lose a loved one – you lost your sole source of economic provision.** You’re on your own and your prospects look bleak.
- ❖ Now after her husband died, at least this widow had a son. At least she could rely on him to provide. **But all her hope died with her son.** The one source of provision, the one source of security, the one source of purpose in her life was cruelly taken away. **She’s husbandless, son-less, and thereby hopeless.** A poor widow grieving the death of her only child.
 - No parent should ever have to bury their child. Everything about it feels wrong. It’s not how things should be. **The death of a child is an unimaginable agony, a nightmare that all parents dread.** It represents the death of a future. The unfulfilled potential of a child’s life is a profound tragedy. Grief, in these situations, is palpable.
- ❖ **Friends, this is the emotional context that Jesus walked into. In fact, he didn’t just walk into it, he walked towards it.** Unlike in other episodes – like earlier in chapter 7 with the healing of the centurion’s servant – Jesus approached this woman on his own initiative. She didn’t ask for a miracle. He moved towards her.
 - Because he was moved by her grief. We’re told that he has a “*great crowd*” following him around. But Jesus is not enamored by the crowds. He’s more than willing to stop in the midst of a busy schedule to mourn with a grieving mother. Look at v13, “*And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.”*”
- ❖ **Now those three words can be interpreted differently based on the presume tone in Jesus’s voice.** “*Do not weep,*” could be interpreted as a rebuke. Telling her to stop crying as if it were inappropriate or excessive. That might be how we instinctively hear those words. Maybe that’s the tone we heard in our household growing up. Maybe we were rebuked or shamed for weeping, for showing excessive emotion. So we instinctively hear that tone in Jesus’s words. **But because Luke tells us that “*he had compassion on her,*” the context would suggest a gentler, more tender tone in his voice.** “*Do not weep,*” can be spoken with love, with compassion. Jesus is not rebuking the widow. He’s trying to comfort her.
 - **But determining whether the words, “Do not weep,” are cruel or compassionate depends not just on your tone. It also depends on who you are.** I could say those words sweetly and gently. “Do not weep.” But if I say them to a grieving mother in the middle of her dead son’s funeral, we’d all agree that that would still be cruel. **To speak those words out loud in a funeral would only be compassionate if you had the power to bring her son back.** If you had the power to reverse death.
 - The great crowd – and even his disciples – have yet to grasp his true identity. **But Jesus knew who he was. He knew what he was capable of.** Look at v14, “*Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still.*”

- ❖ **Now let's pause there and let's consider the extent of Jesus's compassion.** We could easily miss this. Notice how he touched the bier, the open coffin. **Numerous times in the Gospels, Jesus goes beyond what is necessary in his miraculous healings just to make a point.** To cleanse a leper, he just needs to say the word. But before he says, "*Be clean,*" Jesus reaches out and touches the leper (Lk 5:13). To raise Jairus's daughter, he just needs to say, "*Arise,*" but first he takes her by the hand (Lk 8:54). In the same way, to raise this young man back to life, he's going to say, "*Arise,*" but first he touches his coffin.

- ❖ **These touches – though unnecessary to perform a miracle – they convey compassion.** For those dealing with grief, sometimes a simple touch is more than words can say. **But what you must understand is that when Jesus touches a leper, or a dead body, or a coffin, he becomes ceremonially unclean.** And unclean persons are bared from sacred spaces and from participating in holy feasts until they subject themselves to a rigorous purification process. **In other words, in the highly religious society that Jesus lived in, it was extremely inconvenient to lose your ritual purity.** You would try to avoid that as best you can.

- ❖ But look at Jesus. He purposely touches. He knowingly loses his ritual purity. **He prioritizes compassion over personal convenience.** That's unlike us. I tend to avoid the compassionate choice because it's an inconvenient choice. If it's Friday morning and a homeless guy rings the doorbell at church, if open the door, then I'll have to talk to him for who knows how long. But I've got a sermon to write!
 - Looking at Jesus, I'm so convicted – and inspired – to be a more compassionate Christian. **To gladly embrace the inconvenience that accompanies our acts of compassion.** What is that going to look like for you? Who has God placed in your life who's grieving or suffering – who's in need of compassion? It could take the form of a phone call. Writing a note or a letter. Maybe it requires your physical presence, your touch. That'll probably require you to disrupt your schedule, to change your plans. Compassion is costly. Compassion is not convenient. But compassion is Christlike.

- ❖ **And Christ's compassion is gracious.** Note that I began by saying Jesus represents – not just the compassion of God – but the *gracious* compassion of God. Think about it. **Why did Jesus intervene and give her back her son?** Because she asked for it? No, she didn't ask for it. Because she prays so fervently? There's no mention of her praying. Because she's exercising such great faith? No, she's not exercising faith in this moment.
 - **Jesus didn't intervene and give her her son back because of her compassion. It was because of his compassion.** His compassion towards us is unmerited, unearned, undeserved. That's how it's gracious. It's based on his grace. And that's what our compassion should be based on. Instead of reserving your compassion for those who are friendly and kind, for those who show effort or appreciation – **the point is that Christlike compassion is especially meant for those who don't deserve it.** That's what makes it gracious.

Jesus Represents the Resurrection Power of God

- ❖ So the first way that Jesus, this great prophet, represents God is by representing his gracious compassion. Here's the second way – he represents the resurrection power of God. Let's return back to v14 and see how the verse ends. *“Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.””*
 - Think about how strange that must have been if you were part of the funeral procession. It's one thing to speak to the grieving mother. Or to speak to the great crowds. **But Jesus is speaking to a dead corpse.** You would've thought he'd gone mad. But Jesus knew what he was doing. Like we said, he knew who he was and what power he possessed over life and death.
 - Look at v15 to see what happened next. He said, *“Young man, I say to you, arise.”* And look at what happens next. *“And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.”*

- ❖ I find it interesting that Luke didn't write, *“And the young man sat up.”* He specifically wrote, *“And the dead man sat up.”* He uses the Greek word for a dead corpse. **Luke is reinforcing the fact that Jesus didn't just heal a sick man or an almost dying man.** No, he brought back to life an already dead man.
 - Don't grow numb to how staggering that claim is. **As Christians, as those whose faith centers on the resurrection of Christ, it's easy to take resurrection claims for granted.** We already believe the greatest Resurrection of our Lord Jesus, so any other instance just seems fairly obvious and indisputable.
 - It would be helpful to put ourselves in the shoes of those in the crowd that day. **We, as modern readers, just assume that ancient peoples were more prone to believe in the miraculous.** As if they were hoping some miracle worker would come to town and raise their dead back to life. But that's just not the case. Yes, they believed in healings (and Jesus did healings). **But first-century people saw death as a closed door, locked and shut.** Dead is dead. You don't come back.

- ❖ That's why the crowds were just as astonished that day as you would be if you were sitting in a funeral service; and saw a man walk up to the open casket; begin talking to the corpse; and to have that dead man suddenly sit up and start talking back! You would probably scream. And that's probably what the crowd did in v16. Look there, *“Fear seized them all.”*
 - They were terrified. They were gripped by fear. **Now part of that was the pure shock of it all. It was unexpected.** They were frightened by the sight of that shrouded body suddenly sitting up on that funeral bier. To see lips moving behind that shroud and hearing a voice. It's like a horror movie. That's a sight that would scare most.
 - But keep reading in v16. Notice how it says, *“Fear seized them all, and they glorified God.”* **So after the initial shock, many in the crowd began to connect the dots and draw out the implications of what they were witnessing.** This man named Jesus has power over life and death itself.

- ❖ After getting past the initial fright, many in the crowd were simply in awe of Jesus. **Glorifying God for what this means – that, in there very presence, is a man who holds power over life and death.** Perhaps they were hoping he'd stick around town longer and raise a few more bodies back to life. But what's even greater, even more significant, are the theological implications of what they're seeing before their own eyes.
 - **Standing before them is the Lord of Life and Death.** Will they receive him and believe in him as such? From their vantage point, they still had much to learn of his true identity. His own resurrection had yet to take place.
 - **But from our vantage point, on this side of the Resurrection, it's clear that a miracle like this was meant to point to Jesus's own resurrection.** Which is meant to point to a future resurrection that awaits us all.

- ❖ The good news of the gospel is a promise and blessed hope – not that we'll avoid death. **Jesus never promises his followers that we'll never die. Just that we won't stay dead.** Jesus has the power to unlock the door of death. The story of Scripture ends with every single person who ever *has* lived and ever *will* live being raised from death in a resurrected body. That's the future, general resurrection taught in the Bible.
 - **And according to Scripture, those who trust in Jesus as Lord, as Lord of Life and Death, will be resurrected unto eternal life.** While those who died without that hope, who did not believe in the Lord of Life, will be resurrected unto eternal destruction. Destined to suffer a second death (Rev 20:14).

- ❖ Friends, the big question is: **What will your fate be? What's your final destination?** Just like the widow's son, one day we're all going to be raised to life. But to what end? To eternal life in a new heaven and new earth? Or to eternal destruction – forever separated from the love and grace of God? **The point is that your fate hinges on whether or not you recognize and receive Jesus as your Lord, as the Lord of Life and Death.**
 - So who is Jesus to you? **When you look at him in the Gospels, what do you see? Who do you see?** Do you see a good man full of love and compassion for all, including the least of these? Do you see a great prophet endowed with great power and authority? That's what you should see because Jesus is those things. He *is* a good man. He *is* a great prophet.

- ❖ But there are other good men and great prophets in Scripture. Their graves however are occupied by their own bones. They might be able to inspire you. They might be able to teach you. But they can't grant you new life. They can't raise you up to resurrection life.
 - Only Jesus can. **Only he can raise the dead. Because only Jesus is the only begotten Son of God.** Who took on flesh. Who embraced the pain and suffering that accompanies life in the flesh. Who knows what it's like to watch loved ones die. Who knows what it's like to grieve and weep. Who knows what it's like to even die himself. He tasted death for our sins, for our salvation. He also knows what it's like to defeat death. To abandon your grave and rise again. **Jesus experienced all this that you might follow in his steps – through death and into resurrection life.**

Jesus Represents the Abiding Presence of God

- ❖ A great prophet can do a whole lot, but he can't do that. **That's why it's crucial to recognize that Jesus is more than a great prophet.** He's so much more. This leads to our final consideration. Jesus represents the gracious compassion of God, the resurrection power of God, and thirdly, he represents the abiding presence of God himself.
 - In other words, Jesus does more than a prophet. **He does more than represent God to God's people. He is God visiting his own people.** Look back at v16, "*Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"*"

- ❖ Think back to Elijah in 1 Kings 17. **Recall how he was crying out – in three separate attempts trying to revive the widow's son.** Elijah is praying his heart out. He's working up a sweat. He is laboring so hard to bring that boy back.
 - **But Jesus doesn't need to pray to a higher power.** He doesn't break a sweat. He doesn't need to raise his voice and cry out. He just needs to say the word and to say it once. **He just needs to give the command, "Arise."** Get up. Wake up. Come out of your grave. Step into the newness of life.
 - That's the power of the Son of God. **Elijah was calling on the One who has the power to raise the dead. But Jesus is the One with the power.** He is God visiting his own people. Bringing mercy; bringing compassion; bringing healing; bringing hope; bringing new life.

- ❖ Jesus does more than bring us God's Word. He *is* God's Word. **He doesn't just send his resurrection power into your life. He goes into your life.** He sends *himself*. Because, in the end, it's not just about resurrection. It's about relationship. **It's not just about you living forever. It's about you living forever in the abiding presence of God and God's people.**

- ❖ **That's why we can't be content with just experiencing God's compassion or his resurrection power.** I mean who wouldn't want more compassion in their life? Who wouldn't want divine power at their disposal? There are plenty of people drawn to Christianity because they *want* the experience of God's kindness – they *want* to experience his power – but do they *want* an actual relationship with him?
 - Do *you* want one? **Do you want a relationship with God or would you be satisfied so long as his goodness and might are actively at work in your life?** So long as you feel comfort when you're grieving and strength when you're struggling – would you be okay if you didn't have an abiding relationship with the Lord? **A Christian, a follower of Jesus, a child of God – would want nothing short of God himself.**

- ❖ **If any of you are still exploring the faith, still trying to figure out what you believe, I urge you *not* to stop your search now that you've found a loving community.** Now that you have a great small group where you feel the love and compassion of God through the great people in it. **Praise God for those new relationships, but don't settle until you have an abiding relationship with Jesus himself.**

- ❖ **I think it's great if coming to church, singing worship songs, and listening to sermons have all been instrumental in helping you cope with loss.** If since you started going to church, you've experienced comfort and peace – if you're feeling less anxious and less afraid in the face of uncertainties in life – then praise God!
 - But do you actually know him? **Do you have a relationship with the Living God? Don't stop searching until you know him in a personal way.** Where Jesus is not *just* the Lord and Savior. Not *just* the Friend of sinners. But where he's *your* friend. *Your* Lord and *your* Savior.
 - The good news is that that kind of relationship with Jesus is available by believing, by trusting, by responding with faithful obedience when he calls you to arise. When he says to come and follow, heed the call and go.

- ❖ And for those of you who do believe, who have that relationship with Jesus, then I encourage you to press deeper into your relationship with him. **And the way that's going to happen is through prayer.** This prayer and fasting initiative that we're doing with other churches around town is all about going deeper with God.
 - **I see it as a way to develop spiritual muscle memory.** By challenging yourself to pray morning, noon, and night – and by doing this with others who spur you on and hold you accountable – you're basically training your body, mind, and soul to instinctively turn to God when trouble finds you or when sorrow comes your way.
 - **That's what you expect in a real relationship.** Think about when you're in trouble, when you're grieving, I'm sure it's instinctive for you to turn to a parent, a spouse, a significant other, a good friend. **That's what you naturally do in a close, personal relationship.** You rely on each other.

- ❖ It's no different in a relationship with God. **It becomes a real relationship when you don't just believe God is compassionate or powerful – you actively depend on those truths to get through life.** That's a real relationship.
 - So that's why I'm encouraging you to make every effort to train your spiritual muscles – **to instinctively react to sorrow and trouble with faith-filled prayer.** If you haven't signed up to join us in praying and fasting through *Awaken Houston*, then visit our welcome booth after service. And make a point to attend the All Church Prayer Service we're piloting this coming Palm Sunday.
 - **We worship a compassionate God; a gracious God; a powerful God who has all authority over Life and Death.** Being in a real relationship with this God is the highest privilege and the greatest honor. And it's all made possible by his Only Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.