

## Death . . . *Denied!*

Bodies of Evidence, Part I

Luke 7 & 8

### Going . . . Going . . . *Gone!*

I've enjoyed reading epitaphs that have made it into print over the years. One author said the messages etched on tombstones are often surprising and sometimes humorous.

Here are several favorites—some profound, some rather ornery, and a few that are quite comical:

- From an old wooden marker on Boot Hill:  
*Here lies Les Moore,  
No Les, no Moore.*
- Here's a husband's not-too-complimentary "last word" on his wife's tombstone:  
*Beneath this silent stone is laid  
A noisy, antiquated maid,  
Who from her cradle talked to death,  
And never before was out of breath.  
Here lies, returned to clay,  
Miss Arabella Young,  
Who on the eleventh day of May,  
Began to hold her tongue.*
- A woman penned her own epitaph, which spoke of her tiring life:  
*Dear Friends,  
I am goin' where washin' ain't done  
Or cookin' or sewin';*

*Don't mourn for me now*

*Or weep for me never:*

*For I go to do nothin'*

*Forever and ever!*

- Another woman put in a word for herself and made use of some free advertising on the gravestone of her late husband:

*Sacred to the memory of my husband,  
John Barnes, who died January 3, 1803.*

*His lovely young widow, aged 23,  
Has many qualifications of a good wife  
And yearns to be comforted.*

You could consider this inscription the forerunner of *eharmony.com!*

- This corny engraving was found in a cemetery in New Mexico:

*Here lies  
Johnny Yeast.  
Pardon me  
For not rising.*

- A longer inscription on one monument is worthy of reading more than once:

*Like the cover of an old book,  
Its contents torn out,*

*And stripped of its lettering and gilding,  
Lies here food for worms.  
But the work shall not be lost  
For it will appear once more;  
In a new and more elegant edition,  
Revised and corrected by the [divine] Author.*

· Finally, here's the epitaph of an auctioneer named Jedediah Goodwin, who died in 1876, and ordered these words to be inscribed on his headstone:

*Born 1828  
Going!  
Going!!  
Gone!!!<sup>iii</sup>*

Without a doubt, epitaphs, tombstones, and graveyards have a way of reminding us that we are all mortal.

*All of us are in the process of going . . . going . . . gone!*

What hope is there after we're gone? And is our existence merely summarized in a few words on a tombstone—perhaps witty . . . maybe provocative . . . or just plain sad?

## Reversing the Curse

The story doesn't end in the graveyard, does it?

Not on your life! Our story no more ends at the cemetery than Christ's did at the cross.

Thomas Jefferson, one of our founding fathers and co-author of our Declaration of Independence, rejected anything miraculous, as did many intellectuals of his day who discounted the supernatural. I have a copy of his edited version of the Gospels—his own personal translation—which ends with John 19:42:

*Therefore on account of the Jewish day of preparation, because the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

Period. End of story—end of book. It's over. He's dead.

But it's *not* over, is it?

The tears we shed at the remembrance of Christ's death are not born out of sorrow only but out of

deepest gratitude. The best part is yet to come, with the dawning of a new day!

Canadian scientist B. Hardy, now a believer, once said,

*When I looked at religion I said, "I have two questions. First, has anybody ever conquered death, and second, did they make a way for me to conquer death as well?" I checked the tomb of Buddha, and it was occupied. I checked the tomb of Confucius, and it too was occupied. I checked the tomb of Mohammed, and it was occupied. Then I came to the tomb of Jesus and it was empty. And I said, "There is one who conquered death." Then I asked the second question: "Did He make a way for me to do that too?" And I opened the Bible and discovered that He said, "Because I live, you shall live also."<sup>iii</sup>*

Our hope beyond the grave is more than something Christ *declared*—it is something He *demonstrated* . . . and not for Himself alone, but for others.

We need to understand that not one of the miracles of Jesus Christ was performed because the world was filled with the sick and the dying.

The Old Testament prophets had long predicted that the coming Messiah would be someone who had the power to reverse *all* effects of the curse:

- reverse sickness and bring healing
- reverse sorrow and bring joy
- reverse hunger and provide food
- reverse death and bring life (the most significant of all)

Christ did all of these, including the reversal and defeat of His own death.

Detailed manuscripts that date back to the eyewitness accounts of the Apostles reveal this stunning truth: Jesus Christ never attended a funeral that He did not totally disrupt!

Still, some of the most overlooked evidences of Christ's authenticity as Messiah are not at *His* empty grave, but at the graves of others.

These resurrected people can be called *bodies of evidence*—once dead but now living, because of the power of Christ to reverse the curse.

Five instances of Christ's divine, resurrecting power include:

1. the widow's son

2. the synagogue leader's daughter
3. Lazarus
4. Old Testament saints who arose from their graves and entered Jerusalem during the earthquake, as He delivered up His spirit (these amazing "bodies of evidence" have been all but ignored today)
5. His own resurrection

These resurrected people are nothing less than literal *bodies of evidence*.

## Resurrection Scene I: The Widow's Son

The first place Jesus reversed the curse of death is found in Luke 7:11-12. He and His disciples entered a small city that was entirely caught up in a funeral procession:

*Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her.*

If you have ever watched news reports of a funeral in the Middle East, you already have an idea of the utter bedlam, crying, and wailing that takes place.

There were typically four things involved in a Jewish funeral:

1. The tearing of garments—from the neckline past the heart to signify their broken hearts.
2. Professional mourners [usually women] were hired to weep and wail. They often composed original songs not only including the deceased person's name in the lyrics, but also the names of anyone else from the bereaved family. This only heightened the grief and sorrow of the bereaved. For the woman in this text, the name of her husband would have been part of the lament.
3. It was the mandate to hire professional musicians—most often flute players—who would play loud, dissonant sounds meant to reflect the emotional discord and confusion of the mourners' grief.

4. The funeral procession was led by the women. Jewish tradition taught that since women brought mankind into the world, they should also lead them out of it.<sup>iv</sup>

We can only imagine the noise from the shoving, wailing, grief-stricken crowd.

This reminds me of the custom in the Fiji Islands where, upon the death of a loved one, the family climbs the highest hill and begins to cry out with unanswered despair, "Come back . . . come back!"

Here in this biblical scene, the widow walked just in front of the coffin, according to Jewish custom. Although she was surrounded by people, she would feel utterly alone.

The coffin bearing her only son was probably nothing more than the customary wooden planks forming an open frame, of sorts. It was carried by volunteers from the village who made frequent stops so many more could have their turn. The dead son was wrapped simply in a shroud.

Imagine this chaotic scene as the procession neared the exit at the city gate, just as Jesus arrived with His followers.

John Phillips wrote, "The two processions met there at the city gate. One procession was led by the Angel of Death—the other, led by the Lord of Life."<sup>v</sup>

Wow! Life and death stood there face-to-face. And Jesus Christ said, as it were, to the Death Angel, "You shall be denied this one."

The scene was nothing less than a visual demonstration of Christ's mission—to conquer death, swallowing it in victory (*1 Corinthians 15:54-55*).

Luke 7:13 reveals,

*When the Lord saw her [the widow], He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep."*

Literally, "Stop weeping."

He couldn't be serious! This widow was virtually destitute. She was without a provider and protector. In those times, being a widow without an heir and provider was tantamount to utter deprivation, poverty, and despair.

Remember—when Naomi lost her husband and both sons, she changed her name to Bitterness (*Ruth 1:20*).

So, just how did Christ expect her to stop weeping?

We're told in the next phrase:

*And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt . . .*

I'll bet they did! Here was a Jewish rabbi voluntarily defiling himself; the law declared this of anyone who came in contact with the dead.

The flutes must have stopped in mid-measure. The singers must have stopped mid-word. The mourners must have immediately hushed.

## Raising the Dead

The last part of Luke 7:14 relates,

*. . . And He [Jesus] said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!"*

This is an imperative—a command: "Arise!"

Luke 7:15a tells us what happened next:

*The dead man [literally, the corpse] sat up, and began to speak . . .*

The first thing the young man probably said was, "Why am I wearing a shroud? Somebody get me out of this!"

And Luke 7:16a reveals that

*Fear gripped them all . . .*

I guess it would! Here's a corpse sitting up in his coffin and starting to talk through his shroud.

No doubt some fainted, others screamed, many gasped and put their hands to their mouths in shock. There might have been a few who ran away! And those volunteer pallbearers—what do they do now?!

The last part of Luke 7:15 reports,

*And Jesus gave him back to his mother.*

In other words, Jesus helped take off the shroud. He introduced Himself and then brought the young man to his mother. Imagine her joy and astonishment.

At Christ's command, the dead man lived.

Frankly, I can't envision this crowd doing anything other than immediately believing the claims of Christ.

But there's more.

## Raising the Saints

There is yet a future command to be uttered by our Lord. Paul gives hope to the grieving Thessalonians as he reveals,

*. . . the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout . . . and the dead in Christ will rise . . . (I Thessalonians 4:16).*

The word *rise* has the same root word as that used by Jesus to the widow's son.

At death our spirits, as believers, are immediately translated to be with the Lord. But when He comes for His church at the rapture, our bodies [which have been reduced to dust and carried to who-knows-where] will be reformed and resurrected to glorified status, at His command to rise, and will be rejoined with our spirits . . . and we will forever be with the Lord!

*. . . because I live, you will live also (John 14:19b).*

Arise! And with that one word, a son's body was healed and a mother's heart was mended.

Can't you just see those musicians packing their instruments away, the singers a little upset that their concert never got off the ground—they probably didn't collect their fee in full!

This funeral was interrupted—death was *denied!*

## Resurrection Scene II:

### The Synagogue Leader's Daughter

In Luke's gospel there is another remarkable scene where a funeral never even had the chance to get to the funeral parlor.

As Jesus came into Galilee, Luke 8:41-42a relates the story:

*And there came a man named Jairus, and he was an official of the synagogue; and he fell at Jesus' feet, and began to implore Him to come to his house; for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, and she was dying . . .*

Luke informs us that Jairus was an *archon*—the chief leader of the synagogue. This was an elected position, and it would be one of the most revered positions in the Jewish community.

In fact, as the chief elder, Jairus was responsible for the worship services. He decided who the preacher would be for that day—what the reading of Scripture would be. He served as the judge in matters of conflict. In short, he was one of the most godly, most popular, most respected men of the city.

One more responsibility of Jairus as the *archon* was to warn the Jewish people of heresies and false teachers. This is interesting when you consider the fact that, by this time, the Lord had been condemned by the Jewish leaders as a false teacher.

The chief Council in Jerusalem was currently infuriated with Jesus' teaching and actions and had already issued warnings to the surrounding areas. All the synagogue officials knew that Jesus was not on the "approved" list.

So even though Jairus knew that Jesus was off limits, we see him coming to Jesus and falling to his knees, bowing [*proskuneo*] before the Lord.

This posture most often related to an act of honor where the person literally prostrated himself before the revered person and kissed his feet and the hem of his robe and even the ground in front of his feet.<sup>vi/vii</sup>

This was the man in charge of the synagogue—he had probably already issued a warning about the Healer himself!

However, publicly—in front of a multitude of witnesses—Jairus fell down and kissed the feet of Jesus.

Why? Because he was a desperate man. His little girl was dying. Jesus was Jairus' last hope!

And there was also a flicker of faith in Jairus' heart.

Perhaps the stories he'd heard about Jesus were true. Besides, none of his praying seemed to be working; his record of faithful service in the synagogue didn't seem to be getting God's attention. There was no time to lose!

Matthew's account records that the girl was already dead. Any seeming discrepancy is probably in the timing of the messenger who came to Jairus and announced that she had died. Matthew folds that news into Jairus' request (*Matthew 9:18-26*).

Luke gives us the fullest story with more details, which indicates a period of time between Jairus' first coming to Jesus and the messenger's later arrival, bearing the tragic news of the daughter's death.

It's important to understand that Jesus will respond to the request of this desperate man who is literally laying his reputation on the line. In fact, if Jesus were *unable* to heal his daughter, Jairus' career in the synagogue would be over—his reputation, destroyed.

As far as Jairus was concerned, the risk was worth the loss.

Joseph Bayly and his wife Mary Lou knew what the loss of a child was like. He and his wife had lost three sons—one newborn, after surgery; another at five years of age, to leukemia; their third at age eighteen, after a sledding accident. So when Joe Bayly, a Christian, wrote about the death of a child, he had something to say.

*Of all deaths, that of a child is most unnatural and hardest to bear. It is "a period placed before the end of the sentence." We expect the old to die. The separation is always difficult, but it comes as no surprise. But the child, the youth? Life lies ahead, with its beauty, its wonder, its potential. Death seems like a cruel thief. When a child dies, a part of the parents is buried. . . . I met a man who was in his seventies and during our first ten minutes together, he brought the faded photograph of a child out of his wallet – his child who had died almost fifty years before. The death of a child seems like the death of a future [that will never be lived].<sup>viii</sup>*

I have no doubt that some of you readers have wept at the graveside of your child. Whether that child was young or old, part of you was buried there, too.

According to Jewish custom, a twelve-year-old girl had entered her first year of womanhood [for a boy, it was age thirteen, when he was considered a young man].

The daughter of Jairus was at the *beginning* of her future as a young woman—everything lay in front of her. Her father's desperate actions also revealed that she was his sunshine . . . his joy . . . his little girl.

How thrilling to read in Luke 8:42<sup>b</sup> that Jesus agreed to go with Jairus.

## Mission Interrupted

But suddenly, there is an interruption! Two verses in Luke 8:43-44 disclose it:

*And a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years, and could not be healed by anyone, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped.*

Now even though you may want to get on with the story and rush to Jairus' house, don't read ahead just yet to find out what happens! We need to stop

and consider this interruption. This woman was quite a story of tragedy and sorrow herself.

Did you catch the mention of years? While Jairus and his wife had enjoyed their daughter for twelve years, this woman had faced unbelievable agony for twelve years.

Her sickness was called a hemorrhage; an issue of blood; literally, a *flowing of blood*. Perhaps she suffered from a tumor or a disease of the uterus, causing her to continually bleed.

The Mosaic law specified in Leviticus 15 that a woman with this condition would be considered ceremonially unclean: anything she touched, any bed she lay on, any chair she sat on would be considered unclean.

Furthermore, the law stated that whoever touched her would be unclean and should wash his clothes, bathe in water, and still remain “unclean” until evening.

The continual discharge of blood was considered a sign of God’s displeasure with her . . . perhaps some secret, unconfessed sin.

No matter; this woman would have been excluded from the synagogue and the temple; if she were married, her husband would more than likely have divorced her; if she had any children, she would have been unable to hug them.

Anyone who touched her and anyone she touched was immediately *unclean*. Her stigma was second only to leprosy in the Jewish community.

One biblical scholar wrote with insight into her condition:

*She would have her eyes downcast as you pass by her. She is self-conscious, ashamed and afraid. She reads the condescension in your eyes. She fears the indifference of your shoulder turned coldly against her. But most of all, she fears the judgment you bring down on her life; that her illness is the direct result of some personal sin. And with a bleeding uterus, anyone could guess what kind of sin it was.<sup>ix</sup>*

To make matters even more devastating was the fact that she *knew* she had *not* sinned.

Luke gives a hint of that in verse 43; she . . . *could not be healed by anyone.*

Mark adds that she spent all she had on doctors and was only made worse. Mark writes,

[She] *had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse* (Mark 5:26).

Why bother with doctors if her illness was the result of sin. Surely by now she would have endured enough suffering to “come clean” about her past.

But she didn’t . . . because there wasn’t any past to confess.

Just imagine the irony of this scene: she had been excluded from worshiping in the synagogue, and now she interrupts the Lord as He journeys to the home of the synagogue ruler! Jairus is probably the same man who had put her out of the temple!

Luke records in verse 44 that this desperate woman

*came up behind [Jesus] and touched the fringe of His cloak . . .*

The woman literally grasped or clutched, for just a moment, the *kraspedon*—the tassels on the corners of Christ’s outer cloak.

These tassels [fringe] on the garments of Israelite men were to serve as a reminder of the commandments of the Lord (*Numbers 15:38-39*). Faithful Jewish men had a tassel sewn onto each corner of their cloaks.

This woman literally came up behind Jesus and clutched one of the tassels, and immediately, she knew her bleeding had stopped!

And just as suddenly, Jesus stopped in His tracks and asked:

*“Who is the one who touched Me?” And while they were all denying it, Peter said, “Master, the people are crowding and pressing in on You.”*

Good old Peter replied, “Lord, who *isn’t* touching You?!”

Jesus insisted that someone touched Him—not accidentally, but intentionally.

Knowing she had been caught red-handed, she stepped forward and told her story (*Luke 8:47*).

Yes, she could be fined—or even stoned to death—for breaking the law. After all, Jairus would be just the man to give her death sentence.

But in Luke 8:48,

[Jesus] *said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”*

Oh, what wonderful words: “You’re healed . . . go in peace.”

And did you notice that Jesus called her *daughter*?! She is the only woman in Scripture that Jesus ever referred to as “daughter.” What compassion and grace He showed! She had lost her own family, but she was now a member of His.

He also said, “You are well!” Whoever thought she would hear those words or feel well again!

And don’t overlook the fact that Jesus was publically pronouncing her ceremonially cleansed—her days of isolation were over. She could return to her family and friends, her synagogue . . . her life!

Christ also said, “Go in peace.” What a change this meant. She had experienced twelve years of pain. Now she had peace.

The truth is, she wanted health, but she needed the Healer! She wanted relief, but she found her Redeemer!

Now, can you imagine Jairus during this delay: he had dialed 911 thirty minutes earlier. Better yet, he was already in the ambulance with the Lord and they were racing for his home, when suddenly Jesus slammed on the brakes and said, “Who touched Me?”<sup>x</sup>

“Who cares?! My daughter is dying!”

During this delay, as Jesus dealt with the woman, a messenger arrived and whispered into Jairus’ ear (Luke 8:49),

. . . *“Your daughter has died; do not trouble the Teacher anymore.”*

In other words, “There’s no hope. This Teacher can’t even help you now. Come on home—the paid mourners have already shown up . . . the funeral arrangements need to be made.”

Jesus overheard the message and looked at Jairus, saying in Luke 8:50,

. . . *“Don’t be afraid any longer; only believe, and she shall be made well.”*

*Do not miss this.* From this moment forward, Jairus has nothing to depend on but the word of Jesus Christ alone.<sup>xi</sup>

The circumstances are insurmountable . . . his daughter is dead . . . there is no hope.

But Jesus Christ had spoken; He had given His word . . . and evidently, Jairus believed.

## Mission Accomplished

Eventually arriving at the home and hearing the mourners already wailing, singing their songs of lament, Jesus admonished,

. . . *“Stop weeping, for she has not died, but is asleep”* (Luke 8:52).

This image of sleeping is often used in the Bible to describe the death of believers. Sleep is a normal experience that we do not fear, and we should not fear death. It is the body that sleeps, not the spirit, for the spirit of the believer goes immediately to be with Christ (*Philippians 1:20; II Corinthians 5:6*). At the resurrection the body will be awakened and reunited with the spirit in a glorified, immortal body.<sup>xii</sup>

Jesus Christ was illustrating resurrection truth on earth, here and now, in the home of Jairus, as Luke 8:54 proclaims,

*He . . . took her by the hand and called, saying, “Child, arise!”*

This is the same command Jesus gave to the widow’s son: “Arise!”

Luke 8:55 announces,

*And her spirit returned, and she got up immediately . . .*

Can you imagine the relief? Can you feel the incredible joy of the parents of this little girl as she rose from the dead? Death had once more been denied—it had been swallowed up in victory!

## Receiving the Cure

It’s true—Jesus Christ simply disrupted every funeral He encountered. And He intended to do much more than reunite loved ones. His demonstrations of power were designed to illustrate the truth of His deity. He said,

. . . *I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies* (John 11:25).

By the way, He has given His word to you also, and . . . He will keep His promise. And we who believe in His Word will one day hear Him say to us, “Arise!”

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/9/2006 by Stephen Davey.

© Copyright 2006 Stephen Davey

All rights reserved.

- 
- <sup>i</sup> Charles Swindoll, *The Darkness and the Dawn* (Word Publishing, 2001), p. 305.  
<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.EpitaphsNC.com>.  
<sup>iii</sup> John MacArthur, *Matthew: Volume 2* (Moody Press, 1987), p. 75.  
<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.  
<sup>v</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke* (Kregel, 2005), p. 122.  
<sup>vi</sup> MacArthur, p. 76.  
<sup>vii</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume One* (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 316.  
<sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 261.  
<sup>ix</sup> Charles Swindoll, *The Continuation of Something Great* (Insight for Living, 1995), p. 68.  
<sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.  
<sup>xi</sup> G. Campbell Morgan, *The Great Physician* (Revell, 1937), p. 164.  
<sup>xii</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate* (Victor Books, 1988), p. 94.