

Interrupting the Dead

Resurrection Power, Part 2

Selected Scripture

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Jesus was not shy about showing his power and authority on earth. He did countless miracles and taught great multitudes, but nothing sent his message quite like the events recorded where he dealt with death. Death was no match for Jesus. Death frequently crossed his path, but it never came out as the victor. The corruption of sin and death made no impact on Jesus and he paved the way to for people to leave those things behind as well.

Discussion Points:

In the narrative of Luke 7, Jesus displayed his authority over death as he had compassion on a widow.

- What did Jesus say to the widow when he saw the funeral procession?
- What did Jesus say to the dead boy?
- What would the crowd be thinking as the event progressed?
 - When Jesus approached the procession?
 - When Jesus spoke to the widow?
 - When Jesus spoke to the dead boy?
 - When the boy came to life?
- At what point would you have taken notice that something was different about Jesus?

After this miracle, John the Baptist send messengers to Jesus.

- What did they ask Jesus?
- What did Jesus say the miracles meant?
- Why did Jesus do so many miracles?
- Why was it important for Jesus to do so many different kinds of miracles?

Discussion Guide cont.

When Jesus was met with physical death himself, many things happened. When he gave up his spirit, Matthew 27 says that the curtain in the temple was torn in two and there was an earthquake. Tombs also opened and when Jesus rose from the grave, many other saints also rose and went into Jerusalem. Understanding all of those things is difficult, so that passage is often overlooked.

- How did all of those events show the significance of Jesus' death?
- What would eyewitnesses think when they saw these things happen?
- What did the centurion conclude?

All of the Old Testament displayed the expectation and need for a Savior who would have authority over all of creation.

- How would some of the Old Testament saints react to Jesus' death and resurrection?
- How did the revelation about Jesus progress through the Old Testament?
 - What were some things Adam and Eve knew about the Savior?
 - What did David say in his songs?
 - What did Isaiah foretell about Jesus?
- How did people in Jesus' day view the Messiah?

Gospel Connection:

When Jesus came to earth, he came in order that the world might be saved through him. Jesus took all of the sin of the world on himself and took its punishment in death. The rightful punishment for sin is death, but Jesus himself never sinned so he never deserved to experience any kind of suffering or death. Because of his love for us, however, Jesus willingly experienced all of those things so he could provide redemption for us. He desired a relationship with us but we were wholly unable to have fellowship with him because of our utter sin and depravity. So he drank the cup of death and was a perfect sacrifice on our behalf. He then showed his authority and power over even death and is willing to provide everlasting life to all who believe in him and accept it as the free gift that he offers.

Practical Implications:

Think: How does the death of Jesus affect you? How does Jesus' resurrection affect you?

Pray: Thank God for reaching out to you and drawing you to Himself. Thank Him for providing the way for you to have a relationship with Him through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Do: Read the accounts of Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection. Meditate on what each event meant to the history of humankind and how it affects you even today.

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Chuck Swindoll has a penchant for collecting and recording epitaphs over the years in his journal. He writes, “Messages etched on tombstones are often surprising and sometimes humorous.”

Some are sobering and some are humorous . . . here are a few from his collection:

One read: 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.

I didn't think that was funny either.

One woman penned her own epitaph – and she made her point really obvious; it read;

Dear Friends
I am going where washing isn't done
Or cooking or sewing:
Don't mourn for me now
Or weep for me never:
For I go to do nothing
Forever and ever!

Another woman wanted to get married again and actually used her husband's tombstone to make it known – if you can imagine it; she composed his epitaph and it read:

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.

This has to be the forerunner of EHarmony.com

One more; Jedediah Goodwin, who was a professional auctioneer, had this simple message inscribed on his tombstone;

Jedediah Goodwin
Born 1828
Going
Going
Gone¹

Without a doubt, epitaphs, tombstones and graveyards have a way of reminding us all that we are all mortal. All of us are in the process of going . . . going . . . gone!

But is that the end of the story? More than 6,000 people somewhere in the world will have died during this hour while we worship in here this morning; a little more than 150,000 people will die today; around 55 million people are going to die this year!

Listen, the valley of the shadow of death is more like an *interstate* highway and at any given moment it looks like rush hour.

But is that the end? Jesus made this audacious, incredible claim on one occasion that He was the resurrection and the life. He even went on to say that if someone believed in Him, they would live with Him forever, even after dying. That's a claim He would need to back up.

Has it ever occurred to you that, according to eyewitness accounts, Jesus Christ never attended a funeral he did not entirely interrupt?

Five graveyard scenes are provided for us in the New Testament – and all five graveyard scenes are interrupted.

- The young man's funeral procession (Luke 7)
- The daughter of Jairus (Mark 5)
- The raising of Lazarus (John 11)

- Various Old Testament saints who arose from their graves after Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 27)
- The fifth scene and the most important, of course, is our Lord's resurrection.

Let me briefly recount for you two of these five interruptions. ***Take your copy of the Gospel by Luke and go to chapter 7;*** Jesus and his disciples arrive at a small city that was almost entirely involved in a funeral procession.

Look at ***verse 11: And it came about soon afterwards, that He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large multitude. 12. Now as He approached the gate of the city, behold, 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. Luke 7:11-12***

Stop here for a moment and let me set this scene for you. If you have ever watched the news reports of a funeral in the Middle East, you will already have an idea of the utter bedlam and crying and wailing at a funeral.

There were typically four things involved in a Jewish funeral:

1. First the tearing of garments – especially over the heart. It was the custom to rip a piece of your clothing, over your heart, to signify your heart was broken.
2. Secondly, professional mourners, usually women, would be hired to weep and wail. They would often compose original songs with not only the deceased person's name included in the lyrics, but anyone else from the bereaved family would be included – which would only heighten the grief and sorrow of the bereaved.
3. Third, professional musicians would be hired – most often flute players, who would play loud, disconcerting sounds

meant to reflect the emotional discord and confusion of grief.

4. Fourth, the funeral procession would be led by the women. It was Jewish tradition which taught that since women brought mankind into the world, they should also lead them out of it.ⁱⁱ

You can only imagine the noise of the pushing, wailing, lamenting, and despairing crowd. Just in front of this coffin is the widow. Although surrounded by people, she is utterly alone – she already lost her husband and now she has lost her only hope of any kind of life and survival – her only son.

The coffin, bearing her son was nothing more than customary wooden planks forming an open frame of sorts, carried by people who made frequent stops so that as many people as possible could have their turn. The young man would have been simply wrapped in a shroud.

If you can imagine it, this weeping, wailing, chaotic scene is exiting through the city gates just as Jesus arrives with his disciples.

“These two processions met. One was led by the angel of death, the other led by the Lord of life.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Just as we watched last Lord's Day as a terminal sinner encountered the true savior, now life and death stand here face to face.

This scene here is nothing less than a demonstration of Jesus Christ's mission – to capture death and swallow it up in victory (I Corinthians 15).

Notice ***verse 13. And when the Lord saw her (the widow), He felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.”*** (literally, ‘stop weeping’)

You can't be serious! She is virtually destitute. She is without a provider – she is without someone to protect her now. A widow in these times was tantamount to utter deprivation and despair.

And the first thing Jesus does is inform this widow that she can now stop weeping.

Why? **verse 14. And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt.**

By the way, here is a Jewish Rabbi voluntarily defiling himself, which the law declared for anyone who came in contact with the dead.

Just as we observed last Lord's Day, when Jesus reached out his hand and touched the leper, the Lord wasn't defiled – the leper was cleansed instead.

Jesus isn't being defiled by a dead body; a dead body is about to be resurrected.

But at this point in this scene, you can imagine all the flute players stopping in mid-measure; the singers stopped their chanting and wailing . . . everyone just stopped and stared at this strange Rabbi who was interrupting their funeral.

And Jesus said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" This is an imperative – a command. Arise! **And the dead man** – literally, the corpse – **sat up, and began to speak . . . and fear gripped them all.**

I imagine it would! Here's a corpse suddenly sitting up in his coffin and beginning to talk! And the first thing he probably said was, "Hi Mom!"

No doubt some people screamed and ran; some fainted; others gasped and put their hands to their mouths in shock. And those poor pallbearers – what do they do now?!

But notice back in **verse 15, And Jesus gave him back to his mother.** In other words, Jesus helped take off the shroud and unwrap his grave clothes; He no doubt introduced Himself and then brought this young man back into the arms of his mother. What a mixture of incredible confusion and shock and joy!

At Christ's command, the dead man lived. There is another command, yet to be uttered by our Lord. Paul gives hope to the grieving Thessalonians as he writes, **The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout** – and what will happen – **and the dead in Christ will rise – 1 Thessalonians 4:16**

At death, our spirits are immediately with the Lord; but upon His coming and at His command

to rise, our Lord's command will reach into the depths of the oceans and seas of this world; into the caverns and depths of the earth and our bodies will, in a moment, be reformed and reconstituted and resurrected to be joined with our spirits and we will be in our glorified, immortalized bodies forever with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). And what will that shout be from the Lord? Arise!

Jesus earlier had said of Himself, **I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in Me will live even if he dies. John 11:25**

Listen, beloved – one day your tombstone is going to become dislodged and your casket is going to be emptied.

Jesus said to this young man, "Arise!" Can't you just see the flute players packing their instruments away; the singers a little upset that their concert never got off the ground – they probably never collected their full fee.

The funeral was interrupted by the Messiah. What difference should the resurrection power of Jesus make in our own lives as believers today? We – who were dead in our sins and trespasses, but have now been made alive in Christ Jesus (**Ephesians 2**). **We – who have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3).** It ought to make a difference in the way we live for Christ now!

Sometime ago I was sent this article from a man in our church: A man was being tailgated by a very stressed-out woman on a busy thoroughfare. Suddenly, the light just in front of him turned yellow and he had time to stop, so he stopped.

He did the right thing, stopping at that crosswalk, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating.

The woman behind him became infuriated – she hit the roof, laid on the horn, screamed in frustration and shook her fist at the man in front of her for making her miss her chance to get through the intersection.

As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a police officer. The officer ordered her to exit her

car with her hands up. He put her in the back of the police car, took her to the station where she was searched, finger printed, photographed and placed in a holding cell.

After a couple of hours, the policeman opened the door to her cell and she was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.

He was extremely apologetic however, and said, “Ma’am I’m sorry for my terrible mistake. You see, I was behind you when you were blowing your horn, cussing a blue streak at the man in front of you . . .

“And I noticed all that stuff on the back of the car; the ‘Choose life’ license plate holder and the ‘What would Jesus Do’ bumper sticker and the fish emblem on the trunk. So I just assumed that wasn’t your car and you had stolen it.”

So, what difference does it make in the way we live today? Let’s not just sing about the fact that we follow the risen Savior in here; let’s demonstrate it out there. This isn’t just truth we believe – and truth that makes us belong – this is truth to *behave*.

Let me show you one more scene – perhaps the most overlooked demonstration of resurrection power shown to the eyewitnesses of Christ’s crucifixion.

Take your copy of the Good News by Matthew (the word Gospel means good news) – here’s the Good News written by *Matthew* – in *chapter 27*. Now notice the most startling exhibit of all – beginning with *verse 50*. ***And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit . . . the tombs were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many. Matthew 27:50-53***

Here is a company of people who had, at some point in past history, died. This was not a mystical, spiritual resurrection of ghosts – note the specific mention of bodies in *verse 52*.

Who were they? They were the *hagioi* – Matthew says – the holy ones. A word used of Old and New Testament believers.

Matthew says their tombs were opened – and then after the resurrection of Christ, they also arose from the dead and entered the city of Jerusalem.

Evidently, a select few among the deceased Old Testament believers who were awaiting the Messiah, were given their glorified bodies, reunited with their spirits and, according to Matthew’s account, they came out of their graves after Christ was resurrected and entered Jerusalem.

The language can be taken to mean they came out of their tombs and then on Sunday entered Jerusalem; or their tombs were opened and then they were raised from the dead on Sunday.

I personally interpret this to mean that they were immediately raised from the dead and then, and after Jesus’ resurrection on Sunday, they entered Jerusalem.

Well, what were they doing in the meantime? The text doesn’t tell us that they were buried in or around Jerusalem – there’s no reason to doubt that many of them had been traveling to Jerusalem from all over the Middle East – arriving on Sunday to testify of life after death. Matthew also implies in his choice of words that these resurrected saints didn’t stay around very long – at the end of *verse 53* it says they only ***appeared to many***. Evidently they ascended soon after – perhaps with the Lord at His ascension.

But they appeared to many. This is the language of the risen Christ who made several appearances after His resurrection.

Matthew’s words also imply that these saints would have been known – perhaps even recognized. We can safely suggest that these bodies of evidence would have been significant only because they would have been known by all to have died in faith to God.

These were some of the heroes of ancient Israel who had believed in the coming Messiah. Some perhaps had been dead for centuries; some perhaps as recently as the month before. Suddenly they are in Jerusalem!

Can you imagine the sudden appearance of these deceased believers? Imagine what these Old Testament saints could have said? Imagine the introductions to great, great, great grandsons and grand-daughters. Imagine the astonishment, the joy, the wonder, the tears and the laughter.

Who were these chosen bodies of evidence? Who were these heroes of the faith, handpicked by the Savior to announce His victory over death.

We're not told, but I can imagine a few choice witnesses. What if one of the OT saints was **Joseph**? He could have testified "I was the favored son of my father, rejected by my brethren; but I rose to save my people from famine and certain death. Jesus Christ is the favored, unique son of God – He has been rejected by His brethren, but He is the only one who can save you from everlasting death."

Can you imagine a man stepping into Jerusalem and announcing that he's **Job**? And he simply tells everyone, "I know that my Redeemer lives; I know that my Redeemer lives; I know that my Redeemer lives."

Imagine David himself coming back into Jerusalem saying, "This is the Lord whom I sang of; this was my Shepherd. And He will one day sit upon His throne in His kingdom – there will one day be a new city called Jerusalem that will far surpass the Jerusalem I knew – and it will never pass away."

Then here comes **Isaiah** walking into Jerusalem saying, "Jesus Christ was indeed the suffering Savior – the Man of sorrows whom I said would be pierced through for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities – follow Him – He is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!"

Wouldn't it be amazing if one of the resurrected believers was **John the Baptist**? He'd been dead for less than a year – he would

have been recognized by everybody – his message could have been simply this – "I told you so! Jesus is indeed the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world."

Beloved, if someone today claims to have died for an hour and comes back from that near-death experience, they end up writing best-sellers. Everyone wants to hear from some supposed eyewitness to some kind of life beyond this one!

Here are saints of old who can testify – imagine – they can give eyewitness accounts that there is life after death; they can describe the glory of Paradise! How urgently do you think they would be with everyone they saw about making that decision of faith in Christ alone – a decision while you are still alive which will determine where you live forever?

I wonder who God chose to serve as these Old Testament witnesses – I can imagine two more.

Can you imagine what this husband and wife could have said? "My name is **Adam** – and this is my wife, **Eve**. It was because of us that sin entered the world; our rebellion against our Creator brought suffering and death into this world. The toil of work, the corruption of human hearts, the pain of childbirth – it started because of us. But we were forgiven – God atoned for our sin through the death of innocent lambs – He gave us a promise of a Savior who would come and crush the head of that old serpent. We're here to tell you that that Savior came and made the final sacrifice, but we're also here today to tell you that He's alive."

Listen, the question is not, "Will you live forever beyond the grave; the question is, "Where will you live beyond the grave forever." Settle that question today – and you will settle it forever.

Jesus is indeed the way, the truth and the life! By the way, if you don't know Him – don't leave this campus today; we'll be here after the service to pray with you and settle your eternal destination by faith in Christ alone.

So that you can say with the rest of us, by faith in our Living Savior:

He is risen – He is risen indeed!
He is risen – He is risen indeed!
He is risen – He is risen indeed!

He is Lord . . . He is Lord

He is risen from the dead, and He is Lord
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess,
that Jesus Christ is Lord.

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i Sources for Epitaphs: Charles Swindoll, The Darkness and the Dawn (Word Publishing, 2001), p. 305 EpitaphsNC.com

ii MacArthur, p. 84; Ivor Powell, Luke's Thrilling Gospel (Kregel, 1965), p. 169

iii John Phillips, Exploring the Gospel of Luke (Kregel, 2005), p. 122