

June 5, 2016

*Luke 7:11-17: **"I Say to You, 'Arise'"***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Mankind has invested a lot of time, effort, and money trying to deal with aging and death. Some people have grown numb to it. And so, you will hear them say: "Death is just a part of life," as if it is all normal when it isn't. Others will not acquiesce so quickly such as biologist Aubrey de Grey from SENS Research Foundation who says, "The ability to live indefinitely because of being youthful indefinitely, eternal youth... I think that could be perfectly possible." He sees ageing as a disease in itself that must be treated and believes the first person to live to 1,000-years-old has already been born. "This is not a pipedream any more," he says and he's not alone in his mission to extend life.

Diets and supplements and lots of exercise . . . Pills and treatments . . . Hormone therapy that rebuilds muscle and bone . . . Anti-aging products that keep us looking young and attractive . . . Nano-technology where unbelievably small cell repair machines go into the body to do their work in keeping us from falling apart . . . Cloning and body part replacement . . . Cyborgs (half human/half machine) - where biological organs or body parts are replaced with mechanical ones . . . Cryogenics which explores the use of low temperatures to preserve a dead body in order to revive it at a later date . . . Genetic modification where people's genes are manipulated . . . Mind uploading which involves copying or transferring the mind into a non-biological computer system or some sort of computational device . . . Many of these ideas were science fiction in the twentieth century, but today they are serious scientific endeavors with some measure of success.

The apostle Paul blows a hole in all of this when he says in Romans 6:23 that "the wages of sin is death," and most of the scientific community and society cackles at these words of the Bible. The real problem of aging and death is our rebellion against the one who made us. We have separated ourselves from the only one who can take what is corruptible and make it incorruptible, who can change this mortal into immortality. Good gifts and evil things have come from some of the scientific endeavors that we have mentioned, and I am certain that there will be more to come, but we shall see how far we will get as we set ourselves up against the words of our maker when he says in Genesis 3:19, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Mankind is still sweating, and the mortality rate is still currently 100%.

Our Gospel lesson for this morning tells us of a funeral procession that was coming out of the city of Nain - a small town not too far from Nazareth. If you want to know what the scene looked like, picture in your mind something like a plastic stretcher with a dead body held high for everyone to see. There are throngs of people walking around the deceased as they carry him through the city and to the gates with loud mourning and wailing. They are carrying him out of the city to be buried.

But on that day many years ago, the great throng of people is met by another - this one not mourning or in a funeral procession, but filled with joy and excitement and wonder. This other crowd is following Jesus. And then, right at the gate of the city, these two great crowds meet - one going out, and the other coming in. Life meets death. Jesus puts His hand out and touches the bier, the board carrying the dead, lifeless body of this widow's son. And both processions stop and make one big, marvelous divine traffic

jam in the middle of the city gate - a bottleneck! It probably began to grow quiet, and Jesus speaks twice. First to the widow he says, "Do not weep." We might say that too at funerals, but it always sounds so hollow. When we say it, there isn't anything that we can do to stop the tears. We are completely helpless in the face of sin and death. But this is Jesus. He is able to do something about it, and he is able to really stop the tears. He speaks to the dead boy, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And St. Luke writes, "And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and 'God has visited his people!' And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country (Luke 7:11-17)."

Death is not just a part of life. There are no scientific solutions that will take it away. All the diets, supplements, exercise, pills, treatments, hormone therapy, anti-aging products, nano-technology, cloning and body parts, cyborgs, cryogenics, genetic modification, mind uploading, you name it, and whatever new science is coming in the future, cannot deal with the inevitability of death. It says in 1 Corinthians 15:56 that "the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law." This means that death is not merely a physical happening. It is about our inner being and giving an account of our sins under the law and the final judgment of God our maker. We cannot understand our Gospel lesson at all, unless we fully understand that the physical symptom of death is something much deeper, and that it is inextricably linked to our relationship with God. We cannot understand our Gospel lesson until we realize that all will stand before God regardless of age, regardless of how one might have extended life for a period of time, since time itself will come to an end, and all must face the eternal God.

No science in the world is going to stop that. No science in the world can deal with the spiritual component and what death really is. It is here that we are to realize that Jesus did not come to simply remove the physical concept of death, but as he raises the young man at Nain, he is declaring the forgiveness of sins and is giving all a foretaste of the resurrection unto life. Jesus did not come to find a way around death, or to somehow merely push it back. If that were the case, then after the fall into sin, fallen humanity might well have eaten from the tree of life and lived in total corruption indefinitely. That will not do at all. The Lord God said, "'Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever' - therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken (Genesis 3:22-23)."

Make no mistake about it, Christ came to get to the root of physical death; namely, our rebellion and spiritual death, and if he can forgive our sins, then he can change our mortal bodies to be immortal in a forever place that cannot be corrupted. So, at Nain, if he can physically raise the young man, then we are to understand that he can forgive sin and can forgive our sin as well. With that, he can also raise us up on the last day. Science can't do that, nor can any work of man down here - it cannot take our dust and reconstitute our body and command our inner being to enter. But, there is Jesus who says: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep . . . For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father (John 10:11, 17-18)."

Science can play God all it wants, but there will be a price to pay for such arrogance. The young man at Nain was dead and made alive. This was done by God. I am reminded of the words that are recorded in Hebrews 2:14-15, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who hold the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Those are beautiful words! This is what Jesus faced so that we might have forever life. And whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life through him and him alone.

We are told that Jesus is moved with compassion when he sees the widow weeping. As you can see, God has no delight in death. Death was not his intent for us. God is moved with a deep compassion, regardless of what we have brought on ourselves. We are to understand that Jesus came to bring mankind forever life, and to live that life with him in his presence.

With Christ our Savior there is victory, and the grave is nothing to fear. Paul not only says in Romans 6:23 that "the wages of sin is death," but he also adds that "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus!" Jesus is the only solution, help, and hope on the way to the cemetery. In another incident, when our Lord raised Lazarus from the dead, he made this statement: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." This is what we believe. Everything else is a fantasy. Only Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who has come into this world to save us, raise us to life, and deliver us from this messed up creation! Only when he commands: "I say to you, arise!" will we rise and live forever!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott