

### “Don’t Cry”

Don’t cry. I’ve said it to little children. Perhaps you have, too. Fortunately, this week during Vacation Bible School I did not have to say it often. But sometimes it comes up. Sometimes a young one misses mom a little more than most and the tears start flowing. “Don’t cry,” we tell him. “Mom will be back soon. Let’s go play with the other kids.” Other times, it is the playing that gets them. A skinned or bruise knee leads to a few tears. “Don’t cry,” we say. “It’s not hurt badly. Let’s get a band-aid.”

And sometimes, that is all it takes. A kind gesture is enough, a hug, a snack, a drink. Sometimes just a distraction of some sort is enough that a crying child will forget why he or she was crying in the first place. I can say “Don’t cry.” And I can offer help or suggest a distraction.

But I certainly can’t do what Jesus can. When he says, “Don’t cry,” he backs it up with even more love and compassion, with incredible power, and with real reasons to listen. Today in our sermon text, we hear Jesus speak those words to a woman who needed to hear them.

If anyone had reasons to cry, this woman from the small town of Nain did. What little detail we know of her life was terribly sad. Her son had just died. And this was her only son. Not only that, but she was a widow, which means that she had already laid her husband to rest prior to this. So now she was alone. Now she had no one to support her. Wouldn’t you agree that she had good reason to cry?

Do you? Do you have reasons to cry? Whether you react that way or not, we’d all have to admit that we have reasons to be sad. The reasons may be different than those of the widow at Nain, but they are reasons nonetheless. You face difficulties, and challenges. You have struggles in your lives. And when we think deeply about it, we realize that our specific challenges could end up being very similar to those of the widow. The reality of this life is that at some point everyone that you know and love is going to end up with a funeral, with the only exception being if Jesus comes back first.

Parents don’t plan to outlive their children, but they could. Spouses don’t intend to spend years alone after the death of their significant other, but sometimes it ends up that way. At any stage of life any one of us could experience deep tragedy like that of our widow woman. Death preaches a sermon to us, and it gets to the point. Every day that we have is a gift of God’s grace. What we deserve is death. What we deserve based on our own actions and our own impulses is for everything that we love and enjoy to be taken away from us. What we deserve is punishment beyond what we can imagine for our rebellion against God, the Holy One who created us to love and serve him.

And don’t expect to find a solution any more than the widow could find a solution to her loss. She had no power to bring a husband or a son back to her. All she could do was cry. You cannot undo your sin by trying harder or striving more diligently. You will always fail. You cannot balance out your sin by doing good the way so many people think. Even the good that you try to do is always tainted by sin, and for so much of the time you won’t succeed in doing good anyway. You cannot even depend on a sliding scale or grading on a curve either. God’s demand and his expectation is perfection. It is not being better than someone else, or even being better than everyone else you know.

And it is precisely at that point when you realize and admit that you have no solution to your sadness that Jesus lifts you up. It is that realization of the depth of our despair that makes God’s solution so sweet and so amazing. It was at that moment of darkness that the Lord of life appeared to the widow from Nain.

There she was with the entourage of funeral guests, making their way in mourning to the burial place. And just as they arrived at the gate of the city there was another crowd of people. They were not

following a dead man to his burial. They were following their Lord and teacher intent on listening to him and hearing what he had to say. And on that day, all in these two crowds would see and hear something amazing. Because Jesus had the solution that was needed. He had the solution this woman required, and he has a mighty solution for your sadness as well.

As the groups met, Jesus was moved. **“His heart went out to her.”** That is, he had compassion on her. So he said, **“Don’t cry.”** This was not cruel or dismissive, it was a tender comfort. He touched the coffin next, though we might do well not to picture our modern, enclosed coffins, but perhaps something more like a stretcher on which the body was carried to a tomb. As Jesus touched this “coffin,” the men who were carrying it stopped. They stood still. This was different. It wasn’t protocol for the procession.

And then Jesus said words that would have been ridiculous had anyone else spoken them. He said, **“Young man, I say to you, get up!”** Get up! While you might well offer your condolences at a funeral, I would never suggest that you walk up to the casket and say, “just get up!” Dead people don’t get up.

But this one did. He sat up and began to talk. Jesus had given him back to his mother, back from the dead. In an instant her tears were dried. Where only sadness had been, happiness lived again. Jesus had brought life from death. His words, “Don’t cry” were backed up by his command, “Get up!”

And now he says to you and to me, “Don’t cry.” He has demonstrated his power. He raised this widow’s son, and others. He healed the sick. We spoke in our Vacation Bible School about one occasion when Jesus took a man who had been completely paralyzed and unable to walk and allowed him to walk. What more proof do we need? When Jesus says, “Don’t cry,” he has the power to accomplish it in our lives.

And he has also demonstrated his love, his compassion. He sees those in need and his heart goes out to them. Even a world of lost sinners, scattered like sheep without a shepherd. He loves them. He loves us.

And so he tells us, “Don’t cry.” He has power over death. What was once powerful to take all the joy out of our lives now has no power over us. What loomed over us and threatened us is completely powerless. Why? Because Jesus died and rose again. The young man from Nain was really dead. This was not a parlor trick or an illusion. Jesus took a dead man and made him alive, and gave him back to his mother. So, too, after his agony on the cross. Jesus was really dead. His heart had stopped beating. His body had stopped moving. But only for a time. He burst the prison of death and rose to life, giving many convincing proofs to his followers.

Don’t cry because the same will happen for you. Right now, we’re still in the sinful world that sinful people destroyed and perverted. Unless the day of our deliverance comes first, our souls and bodies will be divided by death. But we know that it is not the end. We know that one day Jesus will return and say, “Get up!” Our souls and bodies will be reunited, and we will live forever with Jesus.

Don’t cry. All of your sins have been forgiven.

When the people in Nain saw what Jesus had done, they praised God. They proclaimed that God had come to help his people. And indeed he had. They couldn’t help but come to that conclusion based on what they had seen. They couldn’t help but spread the word about what had happened.

That is our joy as well. As a congregation, we are committed to praising God by telling others the great things he has done. That is why we invited over 30 children to join us throughout the week to learn Bible lessons and to sing their praises, to praise God by using their talents in arts and crafts, and to enjoy their time together. They heard each day how Jesus dries our tears and overcomes our fears, how he leads us through this life and will bring us safely to our heavenly home. And we join with them to sing our praises and to proclaim the wonderful things God has done for us. Don’t cry. Rejoice!

The Text: Luke 7:11–17 (NIV84)

<sup>11</sup> Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. <sup>12</sup> As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. <sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”

<sup>14</sup> Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” <sup>15</sup> The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

<sup>16</sup> They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” <sup>17</sup> This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.