

Without question, one of the most bizarre tragedies that has ever occurred in our nation's history was the Great Molasses spill in the city of Boston. It was just after noon on January 15, 1919 that a gigantic vat at the Purity Distilling Company ruptured sending 2.5 million gallons of molasses out into the streets of Boston. Now to get an idea of how much molasses this was - there was enough molasses spilled to make a gingerbread figure for every man, woman and child living in the U.S. A tidal wave of boiling hot molasses 100 yards wide and 15 feet deep flowed down Commercial Street in Boston, right in the middle of the crowded business district, destroying everything in its path. 6 small children were on their home for lunch from the Michelangelo School - they were caught in the molasses flow and they drowned. A group of city workers were working on the road and were caught unaware, perishing in the molten flow. The freight yard of the Bay State Railway was engulfed in the black goo. The only redeeming factor seemed to be the fact that the Purity Distilling Company was only a few blocks from the ocean bay, and the molasses ran downhill on Commercial Street finally to empty into the Boston Harbor. But in all, 21 people lost their lives in this disaster. Can you imagine the media coverage that such an event would command today?

As very often happens, out of this tremendous disaster there arose a hero. His name was Anthony DiStasio. He was working on the docks by the harbor when the wave of molasses hit him. When Anthony realized that he didn't have any chance to avoid the sticky tidal wave, he somehow had the presence of mind to slosh his way up to the crest and body surf on the molasses down the docks and into the harbor. The molasses had at least cooled now to the point where he wouldn't be immediately scalded to death. But that molasses was still very hot. And when Anthony hit the cold water of Boston Harbor, he immediately lapsed into an unconscious state. The authorities who arrived on the scene shortly saw Anthony's body bobbing around in Boston Harbor, coated like a caramel apple. The police fished Anthony's body out of the harbor, assuming that he was dead. Nobody could have survived such an ordeal, they thought. So Anthony DiStasio was sent to the city morgue where his family members were called to identify his body. But Anthony was not really dead - he had just been shocked into unconsciousness. Imagine the shock to the coroner and the DiStasio family members when the sheet was pulled back from Anthony's face, and he opened his eyes, regaining his senses, gluey and dizzy, but very much alive.

The DiStasio family was overjoyed. And the city joined in the celebration. For in the midst of such a bizarre disaster, a person had survived. So the grief of the loss of 21 lives was tempered by the hope of the one who had lived.

Death is recognized universally as the greatest enemy of the human race. When there is a tragedy, the grief can be great in a community. For not only are family members mourning the loss of their loved ones, but everyone is reminded afresh of the mortality of all of our lives. But when a person survives, there is new hope for people to cling to.

When I was pasturing in the Detroit area, there was a disastrous airplane crash of Flight 255. 156 people lost their lives as the airplane nose-dived after takeoff, skidding down Merriman Road. Grief was great in the community

there as people mourned the loss of loved ones and friends and were reminded afresh of the mortality of life. But then there was a little girl named Cecilia. She was the only one to survive the crash. And she immediately became the darling of the media, for she represented hope in the midst of tragedy. And if you journey out to United Memorial Gardens today, you can find the graves of many who died in the crash. But you will also find there a sculptor of a little girl on a swing - a monument to Cecilia, the only one who survived the tragedy.

We can only imagine the mood change that transpired in that little town of Nain when Jesus and his disciples walked into it on that day almost 2,000 years ago. The whole community was under the foreboding shadow of the major news of that week. A widow had lost her only son. There was nothing quite as pitiful in Christ's day as a destitute widow. For there were no real opportunities for a widow to make a career for herself back in those times. There was no government assistance to help those who were destitute. And in the agricultural society of the day, there weren't any jobs to go and apply for. Almost everyone worked the land in some way either farming or raising livestock. A widow, without children, was left all alone in a society where a great premium was placed on large families so that there could be many hands to help in the fields. Basically, she was forced to scratch out a meager existence raising what she could with the strength that she had or gleaning in the fields of her neighbors picking up the leftover harvest. She was left to a hard life without much reward, living in fear of that day when she would physically be unable to work in the fields any longer. And to the entire community, of course, the destitute widow would represent the frailty of human existence, and her son, dying in the prime of his life would picture the inevitable and sudden mortality of life. What a morose scene Jesus and his followers came upon as they walked into the town of Nain. But that picture was soon to change dramatically, for the Lord Jesus Christ had chosen this locale to be the scene of his second resurrection miracle. And I use the term "Lord" here deliberately. For this is the first of the many times in Luke's gospel that he would use the term "Lord" in reference to Christ Jesus. It is obvious from the context, that he uses the word "Lord" to demonstrate Christ's mastery over all human dilemmas, even death.

We saw last time that there are 3 resurrection miracles of Jesus Christ that are recorded in the 4 gospel accounts. The raising of Jairus' only daughter which we looked at last week is recorded by all 3 synoptic gospel accounts - Matthew, Mark and Luke. The raising of the only brother of Mary and Martha is the only resurrection miracle that the Apostle John records and he alone records it of the gospel writers. We plan to study that next week on Palm Sunday if God allows us to. This morning, we want to look at the raising of the widow's only son. This resurrection miracle is only recorded by Dr. Luke and is found in Luke 7:11-17.

Now I don't think that it was happenstance that Christ performed this miracle in this town. We don't want to spend a lot of time here, for our major focus needs to be on the miracle itself, but let me just remind you of an interesting observation - perhaps it is one that you were not aware of. The town of Nain was a very small town that was quite remote from other populated areas - it was very much a farming community. Nain was located about 6 miles to the south and east of the larger city of Nazareth - about a full day's journey from Capernaum. In the former times, the town of Nain had been called Shunem. Basically, nobody of any importance ever travelled to Nain - it was out of the

way, only had one main road going to it, and there was nothing of importance there to attract people. But in the history of Nain, there was one memorable time. During the days when Elisha was a great prophet in Israel, known throughout the land as the head of all the prophets, there was a well-to-do family that lived in Nain that was then called Shunem who offered special hospitality to Elisha and had a close relationship with him. The story is told in 2 Kings 4 if you want to read it later. This family had the means to make a special prophet's chamber in their house for Elisha, and the man of God stayed there whenever he was in the area. To show his appreciation for their hospitality, Elisha offered a special favor to the Shunammite man and woman. Since they were without children of their own, Elisha told them that they would have a child and, sure enough, 1 year later a child was born to the family. But when the child was still quite young, he complained about a horrible headache. In a short while, the young man had died. The Shunammite woman then journeyed out to find Elisha, the prophet of God. And you remember the story, don't you? Elisha journeyed back to her home with her, went into the room with the young man, and prayed to the Lord that the boy be raised back to life again. Shortly, the boy suddenly sneezed 7 times, opened his eyes and came back to life again. This was one of the most remarkable miracles in the O.T. times, and it happened right here in the city of Nain about 800 years or so before Christ lived. And it was the most famous thing for which this little town was known. Whenever anyone thought of Nain, they thought of Elisha raising that son of the Shunammite family back from the dead.

Now do you think it was happenstance that the Lord Jesus Christ went out of his way to journey a whole day to this small, country town of Nain, and that the first thing that he did upon entering the town was to interrupt a funeral procession to raise a widow's only son from the dead? It's pretty obvious what was happening here, isn't it? The legend of this town was Elisha, the great prophet of God who had raised someone from the dead. Now, Christ is coming to town to demonstrate his power over death. No wonder the townspeople responded by saying "A great prophet has appeared among us" vs. 16. But Christ would give to them the message that he was more than just a great prophet like Elisha, and Luke makes that clear by calling him Lord in verse 13.

Now there are 3 steps in this miracle which are highlighted by Dr. Luke. And we want to look at these steps this morning, for each is important for us to see.

1. First, the Lord Jesus Christ was moved with compassion when he saw the desperate condition of this poor widow. READ Luke 7:11-13.

LK 7:11 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."

Now it would have been natural for Jesus to approach the grieving widow first because it was the Jewish custom for the close relatives to precede the poll-bearers. So as Christ lead his disciples entering Nain on the one main road that there was, and as they approached this funeral procession, He would have first come into direct contact with the son's mother. And the Bible simply says that his heart went out to her - he was moved with compassion - and he said,

"Don't Cry." It was not that Christ was trying to squelch her grief here, denying her the release of her tears. For Jesus knew that it was normal and natural to shed tears when grieving the loss of a loved one. We are going to see this specifically next week as we look at the 3rd resurrection miracle of Jesus when he raised his friend, Lazarus, from the dead. The shortest verse that we have in our English Bible is found in John 11:35 of this passage where it simply says, "Jesus Wept". Jesus knew the necessity of tears, and even shed his own at times. But on this occasion, Christ planned to end this tearful scene with a cheerful scene - so his heart of compassion went out to this widow and he spoke words of encouragement to her.

One of the purposes of Jesus Christ living on this earth for the length of time that he did was so that he could be in a position to sympathize with our feelings of human frailty. Jesus did not have to live for 33 years to accomplish the work of redemption. In fact, a surface view of the life of Christ seems to indicate that 90% of his life didn't seem to be all that significant. I mean the public ministry of Jesus lasted only 3 years. We have just a few verses that speak of those first 30 years of Christ's life. We are tempted at first to think that the first 90% of his life didn't matter that much.

But if we were to do that we would be sadly mistaken. For aside from the necessity of his living a life of sinless perfection, proving himself to be the worthy Lamb of God to take upon himself the sins of the world, it was during those first 30 years that Jesus experienced human life in all of its routine and hardship so that he could fully empathize with all our needs. It was during that time that Jesus worked in Joseph's carpenter's shop. He got tired and hungry and thirsty just like we do. He must have had bad days just like we have. He experienced life in its fullness so that he could be a sympathetic mediator in our behalf before God.

The author of the Hebrews says it clearly in Hebrews 4:15,16: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

We never have to question whether or not Christ understands our feelings and needs. For our Savior is a God of infinite compassion - he feels the hurts that we experience in life.

2. But now let's move on to the second step in the miracle. Jesus then walked up to the funeral bier, touched it, and told the young man to get up. READ Luke 7:14, 15a

LK 7:14 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.

Now, at first, we have a tendency to skip right over the detail of Christ touching the coffin, but we must not do that. For Christ's touch was very significant in the world in which he was living. For to touch a dead body meant to be unclean according to ceremonial law. And, frankly, this just meant a lot of hassle for Jesus. There would have to be the baths and the cleansings. There would have to be the stigma of being unclean for the entire day. And Jesus didn't have to touch the coffin in order to raise this young man. The word "coffin" can also be translated "funeral bier" in the

original. In keeping with Jewish custom, the poll bearers were probably carrying the body covered with a cloth on a stretcher on their shoulders. This would explain how the young man sat up in response to Christ's words. Having touched him, Christ simply said, "Young man, I say to you, get up."

How strange these words must have sounded. Who tells a dead person to get up? But the power in Christ's words became immediately apparent as the dead man sat up and began to talk. Christ had shown His power over death.

There is a silent testimony to God's resurrection power in the Tewin Churchyard, a short distance from King's Cross Station in England. There is a huge, 4-trunked tree that has grown out of the grave of Lady Anne Grimston. Lady Anne was an outspoken agnostic in her day. She had wealth and position and she didn't need God, she thought. Even when she was lying near death, she continued to harden her heart in rebellion against God. Some of the last words that her relatives remember her speaking were these: "I don't believe that there is life after death. I shall live again as surely as a tree will grow out of my body."

Lady Anne Grimston was buried in an elaborate grave, covered with a large marble slab, with iron railings all around it in keeping with her affluent position in life. But a year after her death, when visiting her grave, some of her relatives noticed something very strange. The marble slab had cracked. As they continued to observe, they saw the crack widen and a small stem begin to appear from it. To make a long story short, today you can see a massive tree that has literally crumbled the marble slab and torn all of the metal railings out of the ground with its massive trunks. As many have tried their best to measure the diameter of that tree growing out of Lady Anne Grimston's grave, although it is impossible to be completely dogmatic, this tree is thought to be the largest tree in all of England.

3. But let's move quickly to the 3rd step. Yes, Jesus was moved with compassion over the pitiful state of the lonely widow, and he was moved to help her, raising her son from the dead. But he was not yet finished. Luke notes that Christ then restored the son back into relationship with his mother. READ Luke 7:15b  
Jesus gave him back to his mother.

What joy must have been present at this reunion. The sadness was turned into gladness. The tears into cheers. The widow had her only son back again. No longer was there despair. The hopelessness was gone. She would not be left all alone and destitute in the world. For her son had been restored to her again. Is it any wonder that the people were filled with awe at the power of Christ and said that a great prophet had come from God to help his people?

Now we must make a couple of applications from this miracle for God uses some of the same patterns used here in the spiritual lives of people every day.

\*A person becomes mired down into hopeless despair because of the consequences of sin and wickedness in this world. Life loses all meaning and attraction. There appears to be no hope for the future at all.

\*Just like this widow, we need to see a God of compassion. We need to know a Savior who sympathizes with our feelings and hurts. We need to realize that the Lord Jesus Christ understands what we are thinking and feeling, and he wants to make His power available to us in our life.

\*We need to allow him to step into our life and help us in our time of need. Just as the poll-bearers stopped the

funeral procession when Christ touched the coffin, so we need to pause in our life and allow Jesus Christ to bring his presence and power to us.

-if you have never received the Lord Jesus Christ into your life, you need to do that today. You need to invite him to be your Savior and Lord giving him the right to make you all that God wants for you to be.

-If you are a Christian who is struggling with problems that seem to be overwhelming to you, you need to remind yourself of the greatness of God's power. You need to step out of the way so that Christ can bring his almighty power to your disposal. He wants to do it. He is a God of compassion and understanding. His heart goes out to you. You need to step out of the way, stop trying to solve your problems in the strength of the flesh, and allow Christ's resurrected power to flow into and through you.

\*And as you experience the miraculous power of God in your life, your relationships will be restored. The most important relationship which is the one between you and God will be changed. If you have never invited Jesus Christ into your life, you will find your relationship with God restored as you do so and experience the power of the new birth in your life. 2 Corinthians 5:17,18 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." The word reconciled simply means to have a changed relationship, to move from being an enemy of someone to his friend. That is what happens when we invite the Lord Jesus Christ into our life. Because our sins have been forgiven, the barrier of sin that has separated us from God has been removed so that now we are no longer an enemy against God, but we are now a child of God, part of God' family, we are on God's side.

What a blessing! What a privilege! And all possible because of the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you experienced Christ's resurrection power in your life this morning?