

WIDOWS OF THE BIBLE

WIDOW OF NAIN: LESSON SEVEN

by Sandy Harber

"And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak." Luke 7:15a

Jesus stood beside the bier on which the dead man lay. They were surrounded by the people of Nain, Jesus' disciples, and a crowd of people who had followed Jesus from Capernaum. The weeping abated and the people looked on curiously as the Son of God commanded the young man to "arise." Immediately, the widow's son sat up. And he spoke! It's amazing that the men holding the bier didn't drop it. They had to have been startled. How many funerals end like this with the deceased sitting up in the coffin and speaking?

We generally study this passage remarking on the grief of the bereaved mother and/or the astonishment of the crowd of witnesses. But, what was the young man's experience? We don't know much about him, not even his name. We know that he was the only son of a widowed mother. So, his earthly father was deceased. As far as we know the young man had no siblings, wife, or children. We don't know his age, or the cause of his death. We do know that he had just died that very day, a few hours before Jesus called him back from the grave.

Jesus told us, in the (true) story of the rich man and Lazarus (not the same Lazarus that Jesus raised from the dead), that angels accompany the dead to their destination in Paradise (aka Abraham's bosom - Lk. 16:22). Lazarus was a real person, not a character in a parable. Apparently, the dead are given interim bodies (temporary until the resurrection of their original bodies) because Lazarus had a finger and the rich man had eyes and a tongue (Lk. 16:23-24). Lazarus was comfortable while the rich man felt pain (Lk. 16:25). Both men retained their memories. The rich man recognized Lazarus and he remembered that he had five brothers who were not living righteous lives (Lk. 16:27-28).

Was the widow's son carried by angels to Paradise when he died? And, did the angels bring him back when Jesus commanded him to "arise?" For the few hours that he was dead did the young man have an interim body? Did he see and recognize his father, his family, and his friends who had died before him? Did he see the glory of God sitting on a throne as Isaiah did (Is. 6:1-4)? How much of the experience did the son remember when he sat up and spoke? The Bible doesn't tell us what the young man had to say. It's not something we need to know or God would have revealed it to us. The point of the story is that Jesus had compassion on the widow and utilized His authority over death to resurrect the young man. Some day we can ask him. But in the meantime we can only use our imaginations.

Perhaps he was disoriented when he sat up and wondered where he was and what was going on. He was wrapped for burial, remember, in cloth that was treated with a paste to make it stick snugly around him. He may have had the strip of cloth under his chin to keep his jaw closed. That would make speaking difficult. And it might have been scary to wake up (so to speak) wrapped up like a mummy. I think I would be saying, "Get me out of these burial clothes!"

God may have caused the young man to forget his entire after-life experience. It would be difficult for him to continue living in this world after having a taste of heaven. As the song says, "This world is not my home." It may not have been his, either, but Jesus had brought him back with one purpose in mind: to care for his widowed mother.

The young man returned to this world to comfort his mother. His resurrection demonstrated the power of God and authenticated the ministry of Jesus. I'm sure many people believed on Jesus that day because they had witnessed a miracle. God had used the circumstance of this young man's death for His glory. Likewise, when our loved ones leave this world God can use that circumstance to bring others to Himself. The preaching of the gospel at the funeral, for example, may touch hearts that never would have been open otherwise. Your example, and mine, as we deal with our loss can bring glory to God. We can simply tell others of the goodness of God, Who sustains us and lifts us above our grief.

*"But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah."
Psalm 49:15*