

The Prince of Life

by Gerald Bates in "Free Methodist"

"Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother" (Luke 7:14b, 15).

On that day in Nain perhaps the more thoughtful people were wondering to themselves or to each other why misfortune must strike so singularly in the world. Here was a woman who had lost her only son, and furthermore, a widow, probably with no further hope for sons. "Could things have been much worse?" was the question on many lips as the subdued hush of tragedy spread itself within the city walls. And the people gathered, to offer in some poor, inadequate way, the sympathy one human being owes another in sorrow such as this. Even the heavens formed a merciless reflector for the burning sun as the little procession wound through the city gate.

Perhaps there was some little resentment among the mourners at the intrusion presented by another sizable group of people coming up the hill toward the gate of the city, with a young man in the lead, talking as He walked. As the two groups came closer together, the leader of those coming toward the city stopped His discourse and lengthened His pace a bit, walking directly toward the bier. Some wondered if this were some distant relative of the dead man, others seemed not to notice, in their grief. Suddenly the newcomer turned to the sorrowing mother and in a tone of gentle command said, "Weep not."

A momentary murmur began with those who had come up to form a circle and spread to the fringes of the crowd. "Who is this man? Why does he speak thus to one who ought to be left quiet with her grief?" And as though taking advantage of this pause, He touched the bier lightly as if to stop its progress, and those nearest heard Him say, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." He who was dead sat up and began to speak, and the stranger helped him down from the bier and led him to his mother. From the first movement of the dead man, those around fell back in awe and fear, and now their frightened voices returned, and gradually the excitement began to mount as comprehension dawned and emotions changed from sorrow to wonder, to joy. "A great prophet is arisen," said one. "God hath visited his people," said another. And many went to tell the news. How profound a theology an eloquent deed can produce!

From Jesus' temptation in the wilderness to His crucifixion, there are many intersections of His ministry with the forces of evil, and in each case He emerges as victor absolute. But in this account of the bringing back to life of the widow of Nain's son, we find the supremacy of Christ over evil presented in a wonderfully human situation, and in such a way as to point up the compassionate nature of this One we serve.

DEATH

Here is death in a peculiarly tragic setting—the death of a widow's only son, and that after he had attained manhood. Here was certainly one of the saddest extensions possible of that consequence of sin—death—brought upon the human race by the Fall in the garden. And so in a real sense this represented the handiwork of the Prince of Evil.

DELIVERANCE

And then, cutting across the path of death, arresting its progress, comes another prince, the Prince of Life. At this intersection something of epochal significance is pointed out to watching man which will endure for all time. In retrospect it could be considered a herald of the resurrection in that it demonstrates the indisputable supremacy of the Prince of Life over the forces of Evil and their handiwork.

DISCOVERY

The Scripture seems to make a special point of mentioning that there were "much people" in both processions—with Jesus and with the funeral. This is so typical of man. In both cases there is apparent a certain desperate need; those following after Jesus, searching, listening, looking to Him for new answers and new power for old questions and old problems; those with the sorrowing mother, with only a dim perception of immortality, bound with her in a sort of common suffering and experience born of a common humanity—awed, frightened, helpless before this unpredictable monster, death. This was the stage that was set for a magnificent discovery

"A great prophet . . .," they said, and "God hath visited his people." There is a power! There is an answer! And here they have a slight preview of what God was working toward in their midst!

In a day when men are writing words like these: "The joint achievements of sin and stupidity are today remarkable—so remarkable that we may wonder whether there is not a further mystery of iniquity" (David Paton, *Christian Missions and the Judgment of God*), we need to get a fresh hold on these great truths concerning the personality and ultimate power of the Lord we serve. And the further we travel, the more we see of the terrible, persistent deep-rooted existence of sin in the human family. When we are depressed and saddened by what we see, then it is that we must remind ourselves as Christians that we are serving the Lord, Himself victor over death, however deep its penetration in the human soul.

James Stewart says of this truth that it ". . . dwarfs all other truths into insignificance. It is electrifying in its power, shattering in its wonder."

After drinking afresh of this simple truth, we march again in confidence, born of the sure knowledge that we are on the Victor's side.

GOD'S CALL FOR LEADERS

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ALL His converted and committed friends Jesus said, "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28: 19, margin). "Ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8).

So joyously and loyally did the early followers of our Lord take this commission that when, long afterward, the historian, Edward Gibbon, summed up the reason why the Christian cause spread so powerfully and rapidly through the Roman Empire, one of those reasons was this: "it became the most sacred duty of a new convert to diffuse among his friends and relations the inestimable blessing which he had received."

Today, as one looks out on the professed followers of Jesus Christ, he is made to wonder if that early breed of Christians has become extinct. Numerically, we are millions stronger than that Church of the first three centuries, but, strangely enough, the majority of us are silent, unconvincing, sterile Christians. No wonder Dr. John R. Mott warns us: "A multitude of laymen are today in serious danger. It is positively perilous for them to hear more sermons, attend more Bible classes and open forums on religious and ethical works, unless, accompanying it all, there be afforded day by day an adequate outlet for their new found truth."

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Before I speak what's on my mind,
Help me Dear Lord, to be so kind
To think, "If one should say the same
About me, would it hurt my name?"

Bessie Kindley Poole