



Preparing for the Kingdom-Part 2

Awaiting the Defeat of Death

Pastor Mike Fabarez

So I'm driving up the I-5 here recently—I should say crawling up the I-5. I was in traffic and a big semi-truck pulls up next to me as we're creeping along. It's a flatbed 18-wheeler and on it are all of these smashed cars. You know how they do that—they smash the cars; they were stacked up like pancakes on top of this semi-truck. And you know, when you're in slow traffic like that, you find yourself just next to that truck for a long time. And every time it pulls up, I see different parts of the cars and I go, "Wow, look at that." You know, there's the taillight, and oh, there's a door handle. And I kept looking back through the windshield of my car and catching my dashboard. I kind of had a sad moment about, you know, speaking to my car, "Well, there's your future. It's going to end like this; you'll be on some flatbed truck heading up the freeway to who knows where."

And it was kind of sad, because I thought to myself, every one of those cars on that flatbed truck was at one time a new car. At one time it was a shiny new car on a showroom—or on a car lot at least—and some proud owner took the keys over and signed the papers and got in it and had the new-car smell, and, you know, spent money at the carwash getting it washed, put the Armor All on the tires, washed it maybe proudly in his own driveway. And I'm thinking to myself, every one of those cars was like that. I think how sad it is that every single car in our parking lot this morning is going to be a piece of junk one day—scrap metal. And that's kind of a sad thing. You know you're driving in some depreciating asset; you understand that. But you think, well, what good is there in thinking of that? It doesn't help me; there's no profit in that. Let's just enjoy our cars while we can.

But how weird it would be, I thought, if when you went to a car lot to pick out a new car, all around the car lot were these smashed, stacked-up cars—just as, I don't know, like the perimeter of the lot. Instead of a fence, they just had these stacked cars. Or sometimes they smash them into a cube—have you seen them when they put them in a cube? And maybe at the carwash, like bollards that direct you into the carwash, you just had these cubes of smashed cars as you're waiting to get the vacuum and, you know, drive through the carwash. Well, that's stupid—what do you mean? That would be weird; no one would ever do that. That would be ridiculous.

Well, you do understand, until just this generation, that's really what churches did—not with the parishioners' mode of transportation, but with their loved ones. With Grandma, and your great aunt, and the former deacon of the church—they were all buried right outside the church building. You can look it up; just look up the word "churchyard" in your smartphone, and one of the synonyms is "graveyard." They surrounded their church buildings with tombs and graves and headstones of their



loved ones. When you walked into church, the churchyard was not a jungle gym and a place to get doughnuts. You had to walk past dead people to get into church.

What's that all about? I know, that's so antithetical to anything an Orange County—happy, healthy—person would ever want to see in their church patio. But there was something to that, you understand? Because we walk into church, we're not just dealing with trying to find the latest pearl of wisdom from our life coach—aka Jesus of Nazareth; we're here to deal with issues of monumental importance. Really, the Bible is all about issues of life and death, heaven and hell. I know that's kind of passé these days. But maybe that trend to bury people outside the church—which wasn't just this, you know, country, early-1900s trend; that's been going on for centuries in the church—maybe it really has its origination in passages of the Bible, like in Ecclesiastes 7, which says, you know, people, it is good for you—better for you—to go to a house of mourning (that means a funeral) than to a house of feasting (that's a party), because the house of mourning is the end of every man, and the living take it to heart.

Think about that verse. You know, it's good for us to sit in a service where there's a casket at the front of the auditorium, where we're thinking about the death of someone. The Bible says it's better to do that than to, you know, go to some potluck and tell jokes and have a good time fellowshiping together. Why? Because everyone's going to end up in that box. Everyone's life is going to end. And if the living can take to heart what's coming, then that's so important. Good for us to consider that, as awkward as it may feel.

I know you didn't come to church, in our happy Orange County culture, to hear a funeral sermon. And I apologize if I have not met your expectation here. But indulge me in this sermon, if you would, because as we work verse by verse through the Gospel of Luke, what we find in the passage we've come to beginning in verse 11 of chapter 7 is a story about a funeral. And you may say, "Well, I know how this funeral ends: Jesus shows up at a funeral; it turns into a reunion; it's going to work out all right." Well, remember this, if you would: there were hundreds of thousands of people in Jerusalem and Judea, hundreds of thousands of people in Galilee and all the villages and the towns of the Decapolis. And you know what? They were dying all the time. According to Josephus's stats on the population, just in the single city of Jerusalem there were two or three funerals a day. And how many of those did Jesus reverse? You do know in the Bible there are very few resurrections—even in the ministry of Christ. He only personally went and resurrected three people: the one we're going to read about and study today; one you might remember as Jairus's daughter; and a third you know very well, Lazarus. That's it.

Now, do you think there were only three dead people within the sphere of influence of Jesus in His ministry? Absolutely not. It is the common reality—the inevitable, ubiquitous reality—for every person



living in the first century or the twenty-first century. And as unpleasant as it may be—I suppose you can still slip out quietly if you need to—but as unpleasant as it may be, it would be good for us to sit here for a little while and contemplate this reality.

Let's just read it a section at a time and deal with it a section at a time, and just start with verses 11 and 12 right now. Read it with me, and let's talk about this a little bit: "Soon afterward"—after what? Well, Jesus had just healed the centurion's servant, and he was sure to die, and Jesus reversed all that. Fantastic. And we saw, you might remember, that all this is working up in this chapter to the question that Jesus is going to answer for John the Baptist, who sent his disciples to say, "Are you the Christ?" Because if you're the Christ, you're not doing things the way I would expect the Christ to do things. Because according to the Old Testament prophets, you're supposed to overthrow the oppressor and vindicate God's people, and that certainly would mean that you're doing something about the Romans here. And that wasn't happening. So tell me, are you the Christ, or should we look for another? And the response that Jesus gives is: people are being healed, and there's even people being raised from the dead. So we have a story of healing, and now we have the story of a resurrection.

"He went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable crowd from the town was with her."

Now, that's a sad story. It's sad when anybody dies. But it's really sad when she's already lost her husband, and now she has to bury her only child. That's tough. But you think it's any tougher than the other grieving families? I'm sure there were other widows and other grieving parents who had to bury their only child. Of course, this is not unique. As a matter of fact, it's going on around the world today—someone's related to someone in the 156,000 deaths that will take place in our world today. And I know that number is too big for you to process in your mind. But how about we just think Orange County, because that's our domain. In our backyard, in Orange County, there'll be seventy people today, statistically, that will die. Now think this through—seventy people that will have to figure out what mortuary to call, whether the coroner should be called, grieving and crying as a body gets placed on a gurney and wheeled out to the curb. Seventy people experience that just right now in our backyard.

And with a church our size, by the way, you should know that we have people in our church—about forty of them—die every year. Think about that: with the numbers we have and all of our services put together, that means we're doing about three to four funerals a month. And you may not know because you don't get invited to them all, but we have funerals here all the time. We had one yesterday. It's happening all the time. And I know our society so sanitizes things like this that unless we know this



person personally, we're not involved in that. We don't empathize with it; we don't feel it. It's kind of like your lunch today—you don't want to think about how it's prepared. And you don't want to think of what happens to people that die—the seventy people in our county—because, I don't know, that's gross and weird and unpleasant, and let's just not think about that. But as I've set this up, the Bible says it's good for us to think about that.

And when Jesus includes in His ministry the temporal reversal of death—and I say that because it's not permanent, you understand; this son that He's about to raise from the dead will die again—it puts us face to face with something so profound and yet so swept under the carpet in our culture that we need to realize everyone in this room needs to consider. You want to talk about a relevant sermon? I don't know how you're going to describe this to your friends, but if they ask, "What was your sermon about at your church?" just say, "The most relevant sermon I've ever heard." Why? Because it applies to every single person in the room. Maybe you'll be the son—you'll be the next one in your family that is hauled off to the mortuary. Maybe you'll be like the widow—it'll be your husband that dies next. It could be as tragic as your child dying. You're going to be planning a funeral, you understand that, or someone's going to be planning yours.

I just need us, number one, on our outline, to face that reality: face the universal problem. Face the universal problem. It is inevitable; it is universal; it is a problem. And you may say, "Well, let's rush to the part that it's the problem that God came to solve." Before we get to the solving of the problem—which this is only a foretaste for, as we looked at last week; it's just a sneak peek to the kingdom—we still want to recognize just how important it is for us to have that clearly in our thinking. Because most people that you know—most of your coworkers, most of the people that live on your block—do not think about the day of their death. Christians, on the other hand, are supposed to have a firm grasp on this.

You know Jonathan Edwards, one of our most brilliant American theological thinkers. Back in the day when he wrote his "Resolves" as an eighteen-year-old, number nine on the list: "to think often about my own death." Why in the world wouldn't a Christian want to do that? Because Psalm 39, Psalm 90—all throughout the Bible—what do we see? As you number your days, and you see that your life is just a handbreadth, as it's put in Psalm 39, you can then offer God a heart of wisdom. Why? Because there's something reorienting about you just recognizing your mortality.

This scene of death—not a pleasant one, and I apologize for that—but I've got to tell you, it is something that we need to consider. And here's why: we live in the season of death. And to help us get this in perspective, let me give you the Bible in two and a half minutes—the entire Bible reading. Here's the outline.



Chapter 1: God creates and says five times, “It’s good, it’s good, it’s good, it’s good, it’s good.” All of it’s really good—everything’s copacetic. At the bottom of the first chapter of Genesis—chapter 2—you will obey Me; it’ll all continue to be good. You disregard My leadership and rebel against My leadership; it’s going to get bad, and bad is spelled this way: D-I-E. You will die.

Now, in the Bible, that’s always defined—as they’ll find out in the next chapter—in two categories. You can say, as your Sunday school teacher would, “We die spiritually, and we die physically.” I like to put it this way: we die biologically and we die relationally. Dying is the separation of things. Dying is that one day my software will be separated from my hardware; dying separates me from my family, my loved ones, the people here on earth. Biological death does that. Relational death—the day that they ate the fruit in chapter 3 (which is the third point on our outline)—they rebel and they are sentenced to death. They die relationally: they don’t even want to see God; they want to hide from God; they want to cover themselves in shame because they rebelled against God.

Here’s really the third point: Genesis 3 through Revelation 19—you thought it would take a long time; we’re taking a big chunk of the Bible now—Genesis 3 to Revelation 19. This is the season of death. It is the reign of death. It is the period of death. And you might say, “Well, that’s not how I’d describe the message of the Bible.” You need to understand, that is the backdrop. I do give you this: the story—well-trained theological people would say, “Isn’t it the story of redemption?” It is. Redemption is only necessary when there’s a problem of death—death caused by sin. Genesis 1—everything’s great. Genesis 2—obey Me and everything will continue to be great. Genesis 3—rebellion, and the season of death begins from Genesis 3 to Revelation 19. Now, last point on our outline: Revelation 20–22. We have, in the final three chapters, the defeat of death. We have the kingdom inaugurated. We have destiny now being discussed in the present tense. Genesis 1—we have human beings without any reference to death. In the end of the Bible—Revelation 20–22—now we have human beings restored to a place where there is no death.

You live between Genesis 3 and Revelation 19. All I want to say is, when God designs human beings and settles them in their final abode, death is not a part of it. Death, you might say, is an intrusion on God’s plan. I know you’re good Calvinists; you understand that was all part of His decreed plan—I get that; I understand that. But when you talk about the intrusion of death: human beings initially designed without any reference to death, and they will be restored to a place where there is no reference to death. That’s what makes death so unnatural. The reason you don’t want to think about your death, the reason we don’t want to think about the death of the steer that provided the steak you’re going to have for lunch—even the, you know, whatever the chicken nuggets that are in your kid’s Happy Meal—you don’t want to think about those things. Nor do you want to think about what’s going to happen when you die or your relatives die, because it is an unnatural intrusion into human reality. It doesn’t “work.”



Here's another verse for you—as long as I'm quoting Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes 3 says this: God has placed eternity in our hearts. Now think about that. He's placed eternity—in other words, the software of who we are as individuals, as beings—we're created without reference to the demise of death, and we will be restored to a place where there is no demise in death. And therefore, in our hearts we have this sense of eternity. But the problem is, here's this terminus in that we are going to die. Now, it's not the end, but it's the end of this kind of existence and reality, and that disturbs us. That's problematic. And you need to understand that as a Christian, because that's not what you're going to get from the world. Death becomes an accepted part of the equation.

So much so, and I can't believe that pastors fall for this, but they get trained by the TV preachers—and by that I don't mean the kind on Channel 40; I mean the kind on Channel 4, 7, 11, 13—the people that are in the plots and the written scripts of the TV and the movie dramas and all of that. And they get up and say stupid things like this at a funeral: “Well, my beloved, you do know that death is just a part of life.” I always want to stand up at that moment and just say, “Give me the microphone. You're done. Sit down.” Because, listen, there's nothing more antithetical to life than death. Duh. That's what I want to tell them. You do understand that death ends life. You do get the fact that death is not any friend of any kind in any... There's nothing at all that would make me want to think that death is a part of life. It's the opposite of life. It's the thing that bothers me about death. It's the reason the Bible calls it our enemy. I don't want to embrace it as a friend. I don't want to hold to a “part of the cycle” nonsense.

If you're a Christian, let's think christianly here. And to think as a Christian is to say: the intrusion of death from Genesis 3 to Revelation 19 is a reminder that human beings were not designed for death. Death is the unnatural—get this—unnatural intrusion. And it's the reason you grate against it in your heart. Worse yet—ready?—the reason our society, our people, our time—human beings—don't like this, the reason it grates against us, is because of this: it is the consequence and the sentence of our sin. And because of that, we know that this nice, insulated existence here on planet Earth—when it comes to an end—I am now faced with eternity, which means I am going to have to meet, as your grandpa used to say, “your Maker.” And I have a problem with that, because I recognize death in itself is a sentence on sin, and sin—unfortunately, knowing that I am one, a sinner—I'm going to have to deal with my Maker. And as the Bible says in Hebrews, “It's appointed unto man once to die”—and that would be fine—“but then comes the judgment.” I don't want that.

The average person fears death in part because it's unnatural, and for a greater part because it puts me face to face with my perfect Creator. Reminds me of Shakespeare—of *Hamlet*. Remember, you had to read *Hamlet* back in the day? And *Hamlet* is there: “To be or not to be,” remember that? We always quoted that as kids; we never knew what it meant till we had to read the book. And we realize he's there—and I won't quote it all as though I could, as some actor—I mean, “To be or not to be, that is the



question.” He’s dealing with his own suicide. He’s considering to die, to commit suicide. And then he says, “Oh, to die, to sleep.” And when he says that, at first he says—well, as Hamlet’s considering his own suicide—well, that would be a great thing. It would free me from the thousand things that come against us and grate against us and the pains and travails of life. And it would be great to be free from that. Well, then it comes back and he says, “Oh, to sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there’s the rub.” What does that mean? To die—but that’s not the end; consciousness continues—to dream—ay, there’s the rub. What kinds of things will we face as we “shuffle off this mortal coil,” or however it’s put in Shakespeare there? What’s the point? I may face something far worse. What things do I face beyond the grave? And he says, therein lies the reason that men respect death and don’t choose to die—because we fear it.

Quoting Shakespeare—that’s probably the wrong tact on a sermon like this. Let me quote it this way from Job: as Job speaks of death, he calls it “the king of terrors.” And Spurgeon liked to add, “and it’s also the terror of kings.” No one is exempt. I don’t care who you are, how much money you have—you’re still facing this thing. It is the ultimate concern you should have. And it is not going to be prevented because you’re a great businessman, because you’re a marvelous person, because you’re cute, or you’re talented, or you’re well-conditioned at the gym as the model—doesn’t matter who you are. It is the terror, as Spurgeon says, of kings. Doesn’t matter.

I can’t help but quote this every time I talk about this. As the old Irish playwright said: the statistics on death are quite impressive—one out of one people die. Now, that’s an unpleasant part of the sermon. But have we adequately impressed you with the fact that we need to, occasionally—if we don’t have a graveyard there in the entryway to remind you that we’re all going to end up dead—have we at least said to you, “Listen, think of your own mortality,” and recognize that whether it’s you being taken down in the processional to the cemetery, or whether you’re the widow, or whether you’re just an onlooker with a loved one mourning a loss—death is a part of our reality. It’s an intrusive part of our reality. It’s a part that we don’t like. It’s a part that we naturally fear.

And you can say, “Well, Mike, didn’t you say this is a passage about Christ solving the problem?” Well, it is. This is why Christ came—to solve the problem. But this is solved with an asterisk, with an addendum, with a small “s.” This is a foretaste. Just like the servant of the centurion is going to get sick again, this boy is about to get raised—and we’re going to read this now, verses 13 through 15—but here’s the thing: it’s not permanent. He doesn’t live forever. He’s dead now.

Verse 13: In that touching, poignant scene, it says in verse 13 (Luke chapter 7—it’s printed on your worksheet there): “When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’ Then he came up and touched the bier”—that’s the stretcher that they carry him out on—“and the



bearers stood still. And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ And the dead man”—now can you imagine? Put yourself in the funeral now; you’re on your way to bury this guy—“sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him to his mother.”

This is an amazing scene. They would bury in the ancient Near East—usually in clothes, obviously—and they would wrap them often in cloths, maybe put some things around them to preserve, or at least make them smell better. And unless you were in a rich part of Israel, I mean, this was a pretty simple process: we take them and bury them. And you’ve got this guy shrouded in some kind of wrapping, I’m sure, and he’s being carried out on the bier, on the stretcher. And Jesus just walks up, says, “Hold on a minute, guys,” touches that, and says, “Listen, dead man...” and—boom—He says, “Arise,” and he sits up and starts to talk as he peels off his shroud on his face.

Now, this is a solution—but as I’ve said, it is a short-term solution. It is the solution, though, that should remind us that Jesus is giving us something in this text that is unique, that allows us to have hope that when you die, your loved one dies, your kid dies, your husband dies, that you can have confidence that you not only are not going to cease to exist, but you won’t be a disembodied spirit for eternity. You will have a body back—a different kind of body that’s impervious to death—and, according to Revelation 20–22, you will live on. That is good news and comfort, as the Bible says it ought to be.

The part I want to point out here, though, as we look at this resurrection: it’s nothing new, which is unique—but it’s happened in the Bible before. Sunday school graduates now—put on your thinking caps. Think about how many people in the Bible were personally resurrected by someone. And I can narrow it down for you—not too many. I know people think there’s a miracle on every page—there’s not. But there were other people raised from the dead. There was one raised from the dead by Elijah—remember, in 1 Kings—and it was, interestingly enough, a widow’s son. The widow was the woman of Zarephath (1 Kings 17). And Elisha raises someone called the Shunammite woman’s son—that takes place in 2 Kings 4. A strange one in 2 Kings 13 has to do with Elisha’s grave.

So we’ve got three there with two guys. And who are those guys? The most important prophets of the Old Testament. And I say that not because Moses isn’t important, not because Isaiah’s not important, but because with Elijah and Elisha and the school of the prophets, we begin what we call the classical period of the prophets. Moses—undisputed through the public miracles of the Exodus and the plagues—he’s established as the writer of the Pentateuch, and people listen to him as a certified, credentialed prophet of God. Then we have Elijah and Elisha, and we have one of the most remarkable things of all—a healing, if you will, which was a healing of a completely dead person. And it happens



two times in Elisha's ministry and once in Elijah's ministry. Then nothing until you get to the ministry of Christ.

Sunday school grads, you can think through: how many resurrections do we have? Well, we have Jairus's daughter; we have Lazarus; we have this account here of the widow's son in Nain; and then we have a weird one at the death of Christ, which is not really described in much detail other than that some people rose from the dead at the moment of Christ's death. We have Christ's own resurrection—it's kind of in a category by itself. And then we have two in the book of Acts. Can you remember? There was a girl—little girl—that was resurrected: Tabitha. Who raised Tabitha from the dead? Peter. Then Paul—we assume it's a resurrection—he resurrects, kindly and graciously, someone who committed the unpardonable sin of falling asleep during a sermon; fell out of the window—remember him? (Wake your neighbor up if he's sleeping right now.) Eutychus was his name. Paul goes on—and he's partly to blame; he's preaching till midnight—come on, Paul! And the guy falls out of the window, and they pick him up as dead. We're assuming—we're just taking that at face value—that he was literally dead, and Paul is the agent of that resurrection.

Now think about that: Elijah, Elisha, Peter, and Paul—and in the middle of it, Christ and a series of resurrections. Not many. If you're going to make so much out of this, Mike, you're going to have to distinguish it from the others. Maybe Jesus is just like Elijah. Maybe Jesus has no more power than Peter and Paul. Maybe they were just conduits of God's power to do this miraculous miracle. I mean, come on—what makes this unique?

Let me give you a couple things. Look at verse 14: "He came up, touched the bier (the stretcher), and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise.'" That's a little different—certainly than Elijah and Elisha. Elijah and Elisha—if you read their resurrections—they are pleading with God, pacing, praying; they're embracing this dead person, and they're asking God to do this. And they're clearly asking God to do some kind of resurrection miracle, and He does. This is far different. This is no deference, no prayer to God, no "Lord, would You please raise him?" This is a "Stop the procession. Hey, that guy—sit up. Arise." And he does.

Other than that, in this particular passage there's no explanation about this being much different, although the form of it's much different. We'd have to look at the other resurrections of Christ to see how they were pulled off and if Christ was just an agency of God's resurrection power, or whether He did something uniquely different. I told you there's Jairus's daughter, and the other one with the longest explanation coming from Christ is in John 11—the raising of Lazarus. We don't have time to look at the whole thing, but I'd like to jump into the middle of that to show you why Christ's resurrections are unique when He raises someone from the dead. Now, it's just the same as Elijah and



Elisha and Paul and Peter in that the person raised from the dead is a temporal resurrection—meaning they will die again. Same goes for Lazarus. But Jesus here says something very interesting. Punch that in—turn with me to John 11:17.

Let's jump into the middle of this—John 11:17: “Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.” He's really dead—super dead; four-days dead. Verse 18: “Bethany was near Jerusalem”—if you've been to Israel, you know that, I trust; it's up over the hill, over the Mount of Olives and down the road a little bit—“about two miles off.” Thankfully we're translating that. Verse 19: “And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother.” Lazarus is dead; they're grieving. Verse 20: “When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.” That says something about them—different message. Verse 21: “Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’” That's amazing; it's a great compliment: “You've got power to heal dying people.” Well, I think she thinks more than that. Look at the hint in verse 22: “But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you,” which sounds a lot like what Elijah and Elisha—and, by extension, Peter and Paul—would later do. It's the kind of “God will do it if you ask.” “God will do it if you ask.” “God, if you begged Him, He would do it.” And Jesus says, as He often does—very cryptic, changing directions in the conversation—“Your brother will rise again.” And Martha said, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” And Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life.”

Now, can you imagine Elijah or Elisha talking to the Shunammite woman or Zarephath's widow, saying, “Oh, Elijah's here—I am the resurrection”? Nothing like that takes place in any other resurrection in the Bible. Here He's saying, “I am the contingency of all resurrections.” Then He speaks of the kind of resurrection that we want: “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live”—biological death—separation from your body; yet you're going to have life after that. That speaks to the resurrection. “And everyone who lives and believes”—trusts—“in me shall never die.” This is an unending life. This is a resurrection, not in a body that will die again. It's not like the son in Nain who died and then would die again. This is a different kind of resurrection—qualitatively different, categorically different. Then He says, “Do you believe this? Do you trust this? Do you have confidence and faith in this?” And she said—interesting answer, really interesting—“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”

Now, I don't have any time for this, but you might want to jot down Isaiah 53:9–10. She refers to His messianic claim. Part of His messianic claim—and the rabbis would teach this if they understood carefully the ministry and life of Christ—they understood the connection to the statements in Isaiah 53 that He would die and be assigned a grave with the wicked, and then He would be considered—though He was innocent—a guilt offering for the people. Guilt offerings were killed; you only buy a grave for someone who's dead. This clearly speaks of death. And the next line says, “Yet he shall see his



offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” You don’t have any plans on your calendar after you die. What is that all about? See, they understood this if they rightly understood Isaiah 53: the servant of God, Christ coming as the Messiah, would live after He died. That’s an important observation. She is saying that when it comes to Your messianic claim, I believe that, and it has to do with resurrection. Jesus really ups that and says, “Actually, your resurrection and Lazarus’s resurrection—it’s contingent on Me. I am the resurrection. You have to trust in Me; believe in Me; have faith in Me.”

Now, all I’m saying is this: this may be a foretaste of someone really dead who comes back to life, but the really dead that we’re going to experience—and the coming back to life that we’re putting our trust in Christ for—is a categorically different resurrection. That’s the kind of resurrection I want. It’s the positive resurrection that comes with the arrival of the kingdom, and it is contingent—humanly speaking—on my faith in Christ.

Now, follow me on this—one more passage, 1 Corinthians 15. When the kingdom arrives, we will have this experience of life rejoined to hardware that is impervious to death—a resurrected body that will not die. And it’s a kind of experience the Bible says will be positive only in the kingdom of God if you are alive with Christ. And yet, notice this carefully—look in the middle of chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians. Actually, everyone gets raised. Verse 21: “For as by a man came death”—that man’s name was Adam; he sinned; death infiltrated the entire human race—“by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead”—that’s Christ, fully human; He gets resurrected and resurrection comes to humanity. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” But, “each in his own order.”

If you’re taking notes, jot these three passages down real quick: Acts 24:14–15; Daniel 12:2; John 5:28–29. When it speaks of “each to his own order,” when it speaks to the resurrection of all, you need to understand this: that in the season of death and sin between Genesis 3 and Revelation 19, death will reign, but humanity will have a reprieve from death and they will live eternally. The question is where. My faith in Christ doesn’t mean I get resurrected and those who don’t have faith in Christ don’t get resurrected. If that were the case, maybe we’d have some hope for the universalistic view of theology that maybe, I don’t know, everyone goes to heaven, or the lost get annihilated and they’re unconscious. I don’t know. But we don’t have that. Because here we see everyone gets resurrected. I gave you three passages. One of them—Paul is preaching—he says this, when he speaks of what was laid down in the Law and the Prophets, that we hope in God and we accept the truth that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.

Now think about that. The Old Testament—well, I spoke of a resurrection of the righteous—done, right? Sure. The next passage I made you write down was Daniel 12:2, which is: “All those who sleep



in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Resurrection of everybody. Guess what that resurrection is contingent on? Christ’s resurrection. Christ is the contingency for every human being living forever. John 5:28–29—Jesus echoes that when He says, “Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” There’s a resurrection of everyone. The question is, do you have faith in Christ? What kind of faith? James says, a kind of faith that works. That’s why Jesus can put it how He did in John 5: you will do righteous things as a pattern and trajectory of your sanctification, or you will continue on your path of autonomy and independence and doing whatever you want, and you will have the resurrection of judgment.

Keep reading—we’re in the middle of 1 Corinthians 15; you still have that open—“each to his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to him.” So we have this order, and it all categorizes under Christ—He’s the firstfruits of us who are coming; He’s blessed; He’s accepted by God; we will be blessed; we will be accepted by God. “Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father,” Christ does, “after destroying every rule and every authority and power”—John the Baptist would say, “Amen”—that will include any oppressors on the people of God. “For he must reign” as the leader of the kingdom “until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

Now, when I think about the first order—or, as it’s put in the book of Revelation, “the first resurrection”—the order that I want to be a part of is contingent—humanly speaking—on my faith in Christ. And as I have that faith in Christ, I now get in line and in queue for the resurrection within the kingdom. Everyone gets resurrected because Christ was resurrected to reverse the penalty of sin—at least as it relates to the demise of the body. That goes away, and everyone gets resurrected. But there’s also another line—a line, as Daniel put it, of shame and contempt; as Paul put it, of the unjust; as Jesus put it, of those who do evil—to the resurrection of judgment.

Christ is our only hope. Did I ever give you that second point? Did I ever get that? I didn’t. Okay, well, I’m almost done with the point now, but you can write it down: Number two, identify our only hope. Our only hope. And our only hope is Christ. Unfortunately for your non-Christian friend (or if you sit here as a non-Christian), oh, you have, I guess you could call it, “hope” with an asterisk and a small “h” of eternal life. The problem is, it’s not eternal life—life. It’s what the Bible calls “the second death,” which is a resurrected, tangible experience outside of the kingdom. And that’s not a good place, where God takes His presence and all of His goodies with Him—His presence and His presents with Him.



All right, that whole chapter is great. If I had time, I would go through it all. I would talk about the historicity and the veracity of Christ's resurrection and all of it contingent on that—certainly in verses 12 through 19—so important. If we're just thinking about Christianity in this life only—verse 19—you ought to pity us. If this is just about a kid being raised in Nain and he gets to live another few decades—if that's all this is about—you ought to pity us. This is about eternal life, resurrected bodies, blessing of God, forgiveness of sins, in a place where Christ is King. We want to be in the kingdom, not out of it. And when it comes, that's the ultimate defeat of death. It's the last enemy for Christ to destroy, and it's coming.

Verse 16—Luke 7, last verse. If you were sitting there on the procession from the memorial or the funeral service to the interment at the cemetery—Jesus shows up with a big crowd behind Him, touches the stretcher—the dead body that you were mourning sits up and begins to speak, crawls off the stretcher, and is given back to his mother. (Which I guess I should comment on—please forgive me for preaching; that makes no sense. That's what you're here for, right? That's what I'm here for, at least.) “Gave him back to his mother”—if you take the Septuagint (for the nerds, I guess—the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) and you look up the Shunammite woman when the widow's son is given back to his mother, the Greek phrase that talks about him taking the widow's kid and giving that kid back is the identical—word for word, letter for letter—way that Luke records this. Now, that's interesting, I suppose.

Here's something even more interesting: Shunammite—Shunammite. What in the world is that? That's a person from Shunem. Shunem is a town in the Kishon Valley—it's really called the Valley of Jezreel—that comes off the Mediterranean and heads south of the Sea of Galilee. It's right in that valley there on the northern border of Samaria and the southern part of Galilee; it's a few miles south of Nazareth. Shunem—a Shunammite is someone from Shunem. They believe—this is a theory, and it's a pretty good one—that Shunem became Nain, which, in that little truncated form, made its way down into Nain (which is one tweak of a vowel). And remember, Hebrew is a consonant language. (This is too techno, probably—but didn't get it? If you're following this, you should get out more often. Sorry.) Here's the point: the theory is, this is the same exact town that the resurrection of Elisha's raising took place in. That's why they respond this way—now that we're finally to the last verse: “Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has arisen among us!’ and ‘God has visited his people!’”

Now, that phrase—“prophet,” “great prophet,” even with that adjective “great prophet”—you have to know that when Jesus explains later in the chapter (and Lord willing we'll get to this) about John the Baptist, and He said, “What did you go out into the desert to see? A prophet? No, I tell you—more than a prophet.” If the forerunner of the coming Messiah is described by Jesus as “more than a prophet,” do you think Jesus we should just kindly accept as a “great prophet”? No. So let me word the third point—as cumbersome as it is—this way: Number three, we need to respond to “more than a prophet.” He *is*



more than a prophet. But let me start with “prophet.” If He is a prophet, you ought to listen to Him. If He is a prophet, you ought to listen to His message. His miracles were backing His message; He says that all the time—and we’ve looked at that before. The miracles—and the most dramatic one is someone being raised from the dead—are the credentials that give Him not only the right to be heard, but they should place us, as listeners, on the edge of our seats to listen to Him.

Let me tie this together. As Jesus condemns the cities where He did His miracles—and you might remember His wording from Matthew—as He talks about, “I’ve done all these”—He calls them “mighty deeds among you”—in Capernaum and Chorazin and all these cities—He said, “I just need to tell you that Tyre and Sidon,” which is the Old Testament bad guys in Phoenicia (modern-day Lebanon)—they were the northern enemies of Israel—“if they had had”—(had those too many “hads” in that phrase)—“if they had had the miracles done there that I’ve done in your town, in Capernaum, *they would have repented*—they would have repented.” And He says this—about Chorazin—He said, “Hey, if the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had seen in their town Me do these mighty deeds, these mighty works that I did in your town, they would have repented, and they would still be here as a thriving city to this day. Oh, it’ll be much worse for you on the day of judgment.”

It’s interesting—anytime Jesus did a miracle, the crowds continued to grow. Anytime He did something like this—you can only imagine verse 16; you could not hold back fear seizing you—if you were at a funeral and some person touches the coffin and the person sits up and starts talking, you would be scared. It would be a kind of fear that’s like astonishment—amazement. You know what Jesus is looking for? He doesn’t want you to be impressed with His miracles. He doesn’t want you to be amazed and astonished at what He can do. He wants you to—one word—*repent*. That’s what He keeps saying in His message. That’s what the miracles should make you do—they should make you repent.

Now, I don’t want to throw their response under the bus when they say “a great prophet,” because He *is* a great prophet—but He’s more than a prophet. And if He’s more than a prophet, He requires of us that we listen to Him, and we do what He says, which is to repent and put our trust in Him.

Now, I don’t want to get too technical on this either, but if you go up to verses 11 and 13, I want to show you that Luke is giving us some hints to all of this. In other words, I don’t think verse 16 is a good enough response from the people. But I think in verses 11 and 13, Luke is giving us some hints as to what our response should be.



Verse 11: “Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him.” Now, there’s a distinguishing of the crowd into two groups—that’s unique. And he’s starting the story with saying there’s the crowds and there’s the disciples. There’s the disciples and there’s the great crowds. You know the difference between those in the crowd that want to see Jesus do stuff, and those whom He rightly calls disciples? Do you wonder what the difference is? It’s the word *repentance*. He wants people to repent.

Verse 13: It’s the first time that Luke uses this word for Christ—“Lord.” And then look at it again—verse 13: “When the Lord saw her...” *the Lord*. If you were to track this word, you would have it forty-one times leading up to this passage—forty-one times for the word “Lord.” Thirty-two of those times—follow this now—thirty-two of those times are clearly referencing God the Father. Because in the Septuagint, for instance, if you’re going to talk about the Lord—YHWH in the Hebrew—you would write down the word *kurios*, the word we translate in the New Testament “Lord.” In the Greek New Testament, we have up to chapter 7 forty-one references to the word “Lord.” Thirty-two of them refer to the Father. You have nine of them that are referring to Jesus, but they’re always in the mouth of someone in the narrative. Jesus, for instance, in chapter 6: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’?” And they say... Jesus calls Himself “Lord”—He called Himself earlier in the chapter “the Lord of the Sabbath”—right? “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” Starting in the beginning of the book, we saw Gabriel call Him “Lord” at the birth of Christ. We saw the angels in chapter 2 singing and calling Him “Lord”—“In the city of David... Christ the Lord.” We see even Zechariah and Elizabeth talking about the birth of Christ, calling Him “Lord.” We see the centurion saying, “Lord, don’t trouble yourself.” It’s the first time, though, that Luke injects it in his writing as he commentates and brings the narrative to people. I know that’s not a big hint, but it is an interesting shift. It’s the first reference to this. And I think to myself, what’s the difference between the crowds and the disciples? Repentance.

Clearly, as He says elsewhere, if you see a miracle, you ought to repent. And then you’d better think of Me not just as a teacher, a prophet, not even as someone (bottom of verse 16) who kind of brings God’s supernatural power to your town—not just one who’s like Elijah, who brings this amazing supernatural event to your experience—but you’ve got to see Me as the Lord Himself. Even in how He heals, He heals as though He is the Lord. He doesn’t say, “Lord, heal him.” He says, “Arise.” That is the difference between a lot of people in this room and other people in this room. There are some people in this room that are impressed with Christ. They are interested in what He says. They are curious about it. They are faithful to go to church. But we’ve got to move in our hearts between being “interested” to being fully involved like a disciple—repentant, trusting; from curious to converted (I just wrote a lot of them: churchgoer to real Christian). We’ve got to stop seeing Jesus just as the teacher or “Jesus,” but as *Lord*—as Boss, as King. That’s a shift in our hearts that some of you haven’t made.

And let me just wrap it up this way: there are a lot of folks, unfortunately, that are drawn like the crowds to some kind of benefit from Christ—even if it’s just getting the interesting wisdom from



Christ. But there comes a distinction that must be dealt with. Real repentance is a scary thing. Jesus said you've got to count the cost. I often illustrate it with the difference between dating and marriage. There's a lot of people dating, and they're interested in the person, and they enjoy time with the person. There's a difference, though, of a young man sitting down, assessing his life, saying, "I am willing, forsaking all others, taking you as my wife; forsaking all others for the end of my days; in sickness and health; better, worse; richer, poorer—I'm your husband." That's the kind of thing that repentance and lordship looks like. It's the kind of trust that produces—as Jesus said—the kind of trust that produces that righteous behavior that He says is the hallmark of those in the first resurrection.

I guess what I'd hope to accomplish this weekend with this sermon is giving you a funeral message without all the sorrow of sitting here with a casket beneath my pulpit. I want us to think about issues of heaven and hell, life and death, and then bring you to what I would bring you to—probably much more subtly and carefully and diplomatically if we were at a funeral—bring you to the question: Are you sure you are right with your Maker? And that really comes down to if Christ is your Lord, if your trust is in Him, if you've repented of your sins.

You know what that does? That changes everything about the way you view death. I'm about to ask you a question, and don't wiggle out of it like most people do. Here's the question: Are you afraid to die? Most people wiggle out of it this way: "Well, I'm not afraid to die, but, you know, I'm afraid of the process. I just—I don't know—I'm not looking forward to the pain of it all." Stop with that. Let's just get that out of the equation. I understand—it may really hurt. I get that. But you've been through a lot of pain before in your life, haven't you? Let's not talk about the pain. Let's not think about the pain. I want to ask the question: Are you afraid of dying? To actually being someone who passes from this life to the next.

Those who are part of the crowd who watch—and I've often quoted this—but when Winston Churchill, who was all about watching Christianity and admired Christ and wanted to Christianize society—Winston Churchill, who we knew for his fortitude and his steely determination and his fearlessness—he said this when it came to his time of death: "It does not seem so easy to die when death is near." His knees get a little weak because he knows he's not right with his Maker. Well, in Philippians 1:21, someone who understands that Jesus isn't just the prophet, isn't just someone channeling the power of God, but someone who is God Himself—God with us, the Immanuel—He is the Lord; He is the person that I'm committed to; I'm a disciple; I'm not part of the crowd—he says, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

I guess you could say Churchill and Paul—they're both really brave men. They faced a lot of opposition, and they have steely characters, and they're determined, and I get all that. When it came to



their own demise, there's one who buckled with fear, and there's another that said, "To die—gain." Like D. L. Moody used to say, "When you hear that I'm dead, don't you believe it, for I will in that day be more alive than I've ever been before." I want you to have the latter perspective. I don't want you to sit here and really look me in the eye and say, "Well, you know what, I am a little afraid." You've got to deal with that today. Don't dare get on the freeway—or even the streets of Aliso Viejo—and risk your life without making sure that you have that issue settled.

Let's pray.

God, all I can do as a pastor is present the truth of the message of the gospel: that Jesus came to live for us and die in our place. And You—there'll be a lot of people impressed with the miracles, but it's all leading to one word: *repentance*. If we don't repent from our autonomy, our life of living for ourselves, our unwillingness to put ourselves into the lordship of Christ and serve the King of kings—the King of the coming kingdom—I've got a problem. I should be afraid of my death. But if I understand what it is to put my confidence in Christ and not my own résumé, then there is something about that great truth in the Bible—there in Hebrews 2—that Christ came, put on human flesh, to "free those who all their lives were subject to slavery by the fear of death." I want to be free from that. I don't want to have any fear about my death. I want to be able to be a person who realizes that what I've entrusted to Christ He is faithful to guard until that day—He's got my life. It's bound up in Him. I trust Him. And I realize, because of the finished work of Christ, I'm ready to meet my Maker.

God, I pray that would be the reality for many people in this room. And it doesn't take a lot of explanation other than to say: repent and put your trust in Christ. That moves you from an observer to one who's fully involved; moves you from someone who's interested to someone who's truly converted. Make that the reality, God, in the lives of all of us. And if we're sure—if this is just history to us and that, yes, I know, I became a Christian ten years ago or twenty years ago—I pray that we leave this place with a great, deep, profound thanksgiving that the ultimate issues of life are solved. And may that put everything else in perspective—the things we stress about, the things we worry about, the things we're anxious about, the things we cry about. God, let it change our hearts so that we can live a kind of life like the Apostle Paul: that when our lives and the eternity question is settled, then we can live without any fear; we can live for Christ with an unbridled passion and bravery.

God, make that the reality of many individuals in this church—that it might make up the corporate identity of this church: to be a strong church with strong faith and clear and obvious signs of repentance in our lives. Do this, God, as we entrust our souls to You—the resurrection and the life. In Jesus' name, Amen.