

Defeating The Greatest Enemy

The British philosopher, mathematician and essayist Bertrand Russell (Who died in 1970), did important work in the fields of mathematics and logic, but was also involved in education, politics and international affairs. He was a pacifist in both World Wars, and served as President of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950, he wrote some sixty books over one of the widest selection of topics ever covered by a single writer.

Bertrand Russell was a brilliant man in many areas, but he was also a militant atheist. In *The Scientific Outlook* he wrote, "I think the universe is all spots and jumps, without unity, without continuity, without coherence or orderliness."

On death he wrote: Brief and powerless is man's life; on him and on all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow fall, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day"

John Blanchard comments: "This is all that the materialist, humanist or straightforward atheist has to offer."

"Man has put in an accidental appearance on a meaningless planet, has no transcendent values by which to find direction or purpose and, within a very short time, death will wipe him out."

The philosopher Martin Heidegger called the fundamental question of metaphysics: "Why is there something instead of nothing?"

Why does anything exist, especially human beings with feelings, emotions, intellect and will? What's the purpose of life and how do we deal with death?

Robert Ingersoll was a prominent lawyer and statesmen. After serving as a colonel in the American Civil War he became active in politics. He's best known though as a preacher of scientific rationalism, attacking the Bible. "I insist, that the discoveries of Darwin do away absolutely with the inspiration of the Scriptures_with the account of the creation in Genesis, and demonstrate not simply the falsity, not simply the wickedness, but the foolishness of the 'sacred volume.'" Ingersoll fought to establish atheistic concepts in American thinking

But in the end, skepticism/humanism is a barren wilderness, promising everything but delivering nothing. William Jennings Bryan edited a series called *The World's Famous Orations*. Listen to one of those orations. this is the best Ingersoll had to offer as he speaks over the ashes of his dead brother Ebon C. Ingersoll, in 1879. "While yet in love with life and raptured with the world, he passed to silence and pathetic dust."

"For, whether in mid-sea or 'mong the breakers of the farther shore, a wreck at last must mark the end of each and all. And every life no matter if its every hour is rich with love and every moment jewelled with joy will, at its close, become a tragedy as sad and deep and dark as can be woven of the warp and woof of mystery and death. Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights. We cry aloud and the only answer is the echo of our wailing cry"

Death is the great certainty of life, isn't it? Bertrand Russel was right when he said for man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness.

What is the answer to the great question of why is there something instead of nothing? What possible hope could any of us have in light of the inevitability of death?

Turn to Luke 7 pg 999

Dwight L. Moody's was one on America's most famous 19th century preachers. But early in his ministry he was called upon to conduct his first funeral. Mr. Moody, desiring to do things correctly, went to the Bible to study out how Jesus would have done it. What he found an amazing truth, Jesus didn't hold funeral services! Whenever Jesus came into contact with those who were dead He gave them life!

I. Every one of us either headed for life or headed for death **Read vs 11 & 12**

Nain was about six miles from Nazareth and about 25 miles from Capernaum. Capernaum was the place that Jesus healed the centurion's servant. Nain was about a full day's walk from Capernaum, but a large crowd followed him anyway.

The name "Nain" means "pleasant," but what Jesus encountered outside the gates

of Nain was far from pleasant. Outside the gates of Nain Jesus encountered death and despair.

Since the Jews bury their dead the day they die Jesus and His followers arrived late on the same day this fellow died. They're walking into town as the funeral procession is making it's way out of town.

I picture Jesus leading His group, except for maybe a eager child or two running on ahead. Around Jesus on the road would be a few of his disciples engaged with him in conversation, and a few from the learners in the crowd. Strung around behind them along the road were hundreds of others, walking, following, anxious to find out what Jesus would do at the next stop.

Women would usually lead a funeral procession, accompanied by a lot of weeping. This widow may have been too poor to hire professional mourners, but the whole town seemed to have turned out to support her in her time of grief. Accompanying a body to the burial place was considered a "good work," a "spiritual work."

The body was carried upon a bier, which the historian Alfred Edersheim describes as like a wicker stretcher. There was no casket, especially no closed casket. The body would have been wrapped in a burial shroud, the face exposed. And the men would take turns sharing the responsibility of pall bearer. They were on their way to the burial grounds, which would be in some caves a few miles outside of town where all their dead were buried.

This woman was a widow so she was headed for the same place where her husband lay. Now her son was gone and she was alone in the world. Widowhood is hard enough in our own century. There is the emptiness, the loneliness. So much of our social life seems centered around families.

In Jesus day when a husband died, the wife would struggle with her children to work to farm. To plow in the spring, and to plant. To harvest in the summer, and winnow and gather the grain. As well as all the duties of a mother to prepare the meals, grind the flour for bread and so on.

But this widow had no more children to raise to farming. She and her husband had one child. Verse 14 refers to him as a "young man." The Greek word means, "young man" (from about the 24th to the 40th year.) He had cared for his mother in

her widowhood, done the hard work of farming, but now he was gone. Dead, silent forever. And she was alone.

A widow faced in a bleak future. There were no jobs for widows. Normally, she would live in one of her children's homes, contribute to the household labor, and receive from the support earned for the family.

But with no son, and no family, a widow was left to scrape by. There was no Social Security system, no community welfare, no general relief for the poor.

Sometimes, like today when her only son was being buried, the towns people would surround her with support. But in days to come, who would take in another mouth that needed to be fed? Widowhood could be very dismal and very lonely.

There's some striking imagery here. What a contrast between the two large crowds. One is following the Lord of life, and one is following a testimony to the reality of death.

Spiritually speaking, each one of us is in one of those two crowds. If you have trusted Christ, you are going to the city. Hebrews 11:22 says: *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels...*

Jesus is The Lord of Life. His book is the Book of Life. He gives eternal life.

If you haven't trusted Christ you're already in the cemetery. The Bible says without Christ we're dead in trespasses and sins. John 3:36 *"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

I. Every one of us either headed for life or headed for death

Our hope according to the Bible is only in Jesus. Why?

II. Jesus is the Only Son of the Father

What an interesting meeting. The widow's son and the Son of God. Verse 12 tells us that this was the widow's only son. We can understand that concept. But Jesus

is described in the Bible as God's *only begotten Son*. That's a little harder to understand.

Doesn't God have lots of sons? Aren't believers described as sons of God? We are, but we're never called "The son of God" or "only begotten sons."

This unique title, "The Only Begotten Son," is used five times of Jesus in the New Testament.

"Only begotten" comes from *monogenes* in Greek. Monogenes is made up of two Greek words. *Mono* means "one" or "only." *Ginomai* is a verb meaning "to cause to be." Our English word "generate" comes from *ginomai*.

Monogenes is the word "only son" here in Luke 7:12. It can mean only one born. That's obviously what it means when it refers to the widow's son.

But what about Jesus. When were told that *God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*. John obviously isn't saying God physically begot a son.

There's another meaning to *monogenes*. It can mean "one of a kind." **Turn to Heb 11:17 pg 1155 Read vs 17 + 18**

Isaac wasn't the only child that Abraham had fathered at this point. Isaac had an older brother named Ishmael. But Ishmael wasn't part of the promised line that the Messiah would come through. Only Isaac was. So the writer of Hebrews uses the Greek term *monogenesto* to describe him.

Isaac was Abraham's "only begotten son." He was uniquely blessed.

Jesus is the "Unique One," the "Unparalleled One," or the "Incomparable One." He is the Son of God in a unique sense that is totally different from any human father-son relationship. This title is used to indicate the uniqueness of Christ in the plan of salvation.

He is the unique manifestation of the nature and character of God the Father. Christ was alone qualified to save a lost world. In the final judgement of the world, the criterion of acceptance before God is belief in "the only begotten Son of God" And, God manifested His supreme love to all humanity by sending His "only begotten Son."

Jesus Christ is the unique manifestation of God's redeeming love and grace. Everything about Jesus Christ is unique! "When God gave His Only Begotten Son to our world, He gave all the treasures of heaven... The greatest display of majesty and power is given to the world through the Only Begotten Son of God."

Our only hope of forgiveness is through Jesus Christ. If we reject the one that God sent to be our unique sin bearer, there's no hope.

Back to Luke 7

I. Every one of us either headed for life or headed for death

II. Jesus is the Only Son of the Father

But, even though He is the unique son of God ...

III. Jesus is Touched with the Feelings of Our Infirmaries **Read vs 13**

First we saw two crowds meeting. Then two only sons. Now we see two suffers meet.

This woman's in some of the deepest pain that can be experienced as a human being. She's in grief.

Luke records for us in two other places in his gospel people who had tragedy come upon their only child. In Luke chapter eight we meet Jarius who had a daughter who was sick, his only daughter. In Luke chapter nine we meet a man whose only son was demon possessed.

The pain of a tragedy happening to a child is almost immeasurable, but the pain of it happening to an only child is even greater. In this instance the pain didn't come from her child being sick or being demon possessed, at least with these two cases you still have your child. No, the pain came from losing an only child to death. She not only lost a child; she lost her only child.

I don't know what it's like to loose a child in death. That's an experience I hope I never have. But, I do know people who have lost children and they've told me that there is nothing in life more painful.

I have to believe that only those who have lost a child can truly understand the grief and sorrow that is being felt in this passage. This tragic death resulted in a great pain for a mourning mother.

Nicholas Wolterstorff wrote a book entitled: *Lament for a Son*. Wolterstorff lost his 25-year-old son in a rock climbing accident in the mountains of Austria. Eric, his son, was doing what he liked best; exploring the majesty of God's creation when his foot slipped and he plunged down the mountainside. His life was crushed by the rocks.

Wolterstorff wrote in his book, "It's so wrong, so profoundly wrong, for a child to die before its parents. It's hard enough to bury our parents, but that we expect. Our parents belong to our past; our children belong to our future. How can I bury my son, my future, one of the next in line?"

That's the pain of losing a child. That's the pain that this widow from Nain was experiencing when Jesus came upon the funeral procession.

Isaiah 53:3 Gives a prophecy of Jesus. It says, *He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.*

Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus. He wept over the city of Jerusalem. He wept in the garden of Gethsemane.

We tend to laugh when things are going well and only cry when trouble hits us personally. But see it's all personal to Jesus. He's the creator. John 1:3 *All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*

Suppose you were an artist. You loved to paint landscapes. And you painted a particularly beautiful scene. You spent hours and hours painting meticulous detail and intricacies. Your work was so good that you were given a chance to display it at the Baltimore museum of art.

The big day comes and you walk in to the area where your picture is displayed and lo and behold there I stand with my magic markers. I have drawn stick figures of people and animals all over your artwork.

How would you feel? Angry? No question. Frustrated? I'm sure. Like sitting down and weeping (after you punched my lights out)? Absolutely.

Now imagine the world is your canvass. It's you who created the beauty and diversity. You're responsible for the wondrous creation. You even created human beings and placed them in paradise.

And then the very people you created marred your creation with sin and rebellion. Is it any wonder that God weeps? Is it any wonder that Jesus is “The Man of Sorrows?”

We see our sin as inconsequential. We say, “Sure I loose my temper, but I’m Irish, what do you expect?” or “Yea, I cheated on my income taxes, but hey everybody does it.” During the Clinton/Lewinski debacle people were saying, “What’s the big deal with adultery? Every body cheats once in a while!”

We sin against God, mar His creation, ignore our creator unless we have a calamity to deal with then we cry out to Him.

When Jesus Christ went to the cross He took our sins upon Himself. 1Peter 2:24
...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree...

Jesus Christ knows first hand the destructiveness of sin. Jesus knows first hand the degrading, hideous nature of sin.

That’s why He’s called The Man of Sorrows. That’s why He had compassion on this woman. He knows better than anyone else sin’s pain.

But now notice he didn’t just say, “I’m sorry for your loss.”

I. Every one of us either headed for life or headed for death

II. Jesus is the Only Son of the Father

III. Jesus is Touched with the Feelings of Our Infirmaries

IV. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

Read vs 14 & 15

Two crowds met, two only sons met, two suffers met, ...and two enemies met.

I Corinthians 15:26 calls death the “*last enemy*.” Death is our greatest enemy. We’ve made so many wonderful medical advances in the last few years but eventually everybody still dies. I can imagine that being a physician is very rewarding. To see people beat life-threatening illnesses has to be priceless. But down inside you still have to wrestle with the fact that every single person you treat will die! No exceptions.

Death is a thief and a robber. It takes people we love out of our lives. They're gone and there's nothing we can do to get them back. Death is a merciless enemy.

The atheist tries to duck the problem of death by saying that death isn't a problem because it's just oblivion and we won't know any thing because we'll cease to exist.

The French philosopher Albert Camus said that death is philosophy's only problem. That's quite the statement. Not only is death a problem, but it is a large one. Why is death such a problem for an atheist like Camus?

The atheistic existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre said that death is not-threatening provided we view it in the third person. It isn't until we face the first person, "I am going to die, my death," that death becomes threatening.

We talk about death being just a natural part of life but when it happens to someone we love it seems so out of place. It seems so wrong. They were just here and now they're gone.

That's because death isn't natural. It's inevitable, but it's not natural. Death is an invader. God is a God of life. He created us to live. That's why we value life so highly. That's why if we run over a squirrel with our car we're upset, but if we run over a person we're devastated.

Life matters. In God's future kingdom when all things are made new *there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying.*

There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." That's Rev 21.

Here in our passage death, the enemy of man, and Jesus the enemy of death meet. And notice who wins.

Dr. Ralph F. Wilson describes the scene this way: The women are in front, still overflowing with tears, flutes still playing mournfully, as Jesus' party begins to merge with the funeral procession. But now Jesus reaches toward the wicker bier and touches it. Suddenly, I imagine, the sobbing and wailing and flute melody die in midphrase. Jesus is about to do something.

"Young man, I say to you, get up!" Jesus' voice is clear in the stillness, and all those around are wondering what will happen. Suddenly, the dead man sits up on the bier, still held high on the shoulders of the bearers. An involuntary gasp can be heard throughout the crowd. Some recoil in shock. The dead man, now live, isn't quite sure where he is, and the bearers quickly, if somewhat uncoordinatedly, lower the bier to the ground.

Now Jesus presents him to his mother. He gets up off the stretcher and embraces her. Now, instead of silence there is talking and laughing and weeping for joy from both mourners and those accompanying Jesus. They are now one multitude caught up in wonder and joy. And in the midst is Jesus, smiling through his tears.

Jesus Christ has the power over death because he defeated death through His resurrection. This was just a preview.

Read vs 16

The people were right, there was a great prophet among them, and God had visited his people. In fact, Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. Yes God had visited humanity by coming in human flesh. He had visited humanity for a purpose, and that purpose was to destroy the penalty and the power of sin and death. How would he do that?

He would do it by living a sinless life and offering himself as an atoning sacrifice upon the cross. On the cross he would take upon himself the curse of sin. On the cross he would take upon himself the penalty of sin. Jesus won the victory over the penalty of sin. But Jesus did not stop there. He was buried and on the third day of being in a tomb he rose to life conquering the power of sin, conquering the power of death.

Jesus encountered death and despair once for all. He encountered death and despair by going to the cross for our sin, and being raised to life for our justification.

Everyone who has put their trust in Jesus Christ as Savior have victory over death and despair. We have victory over death because the scriptures tell us that Jesus swallowed up death in victory.

"O Death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin,

and the strength of sin is the Law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Bertrand Russel wrote: "Brief and powerless is man's life; on him and on all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark."

God's Word promises: *but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.* (II Timothy 1:10)