

Russell Kelfer

Arise!

988-A

Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

Arise!

Christian, do you feel lonely
As though nobody hears your prayers?
Beloved, I have good news for you!
You belong to a God who cares!

You belong to a God who actually hurts
When life's pain takes you unawares.
You belong to a God who weeps when you weep;
You belong to a God who cares!

Your God cares! He really cares! He cares that you are hurting. He cares that you are grieving. He cares that you are lonely. God cares. He may not change your circumstances the way you would desire; but the reason is He cares too much to take from you what He is making of you...what you need to be. But, oh, Beloved, your God cares.

And if you are one of those who have suffered in some special way from the world's perspective, I would remind you today that the Scripture indicates to us that you occupy a place of honor in the heart of God. If you are a widow, for instance, you have a special place in the heart of God. The Scripture confirms that. The lame, the blind, the deaf...all you have to do is read the Scriptures to know that God sets apart in His heart of hearts a special compartment of love for those whose lives have been so dramatically scarred by the effects of the curse in this world. God cares! *Oh, how our God cares!*

You may be hurting today in ways no one around you suspects. You may be hurting today by things you could never have dreamed in your wildest imagination would touch your life. But, Beloved, the extra grace of God reserved for those whose hearts seem to needlessly break is simply waiting to be poured into your life. Today's story is perfect proof from the perfect Word of the living God how very much God cares and how that extra measure of grace is yours for the taking.

The lesson is entitled: "Arise!" Here is our outline:

I- The Battle Goes On!

II- The Crisis Was Hopeless!

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III- The Lord Really Cares!

IV- The Lord Does Something When He Cares!

V- The World Notices When The Lord Does Something!

I- THE BATTLE GOES ON!

Let's be brutally honest about it. While God lived on planet earth in the form of Jesus Christ, His life was day after day of spiritual warfare and circumstantial difficulties. It would seem to even the most casual observer that Jesus simply moved quietly from one crisis to another, from one trauma to another, from one battle to another. And this is the same life to which you and I have been called. It is a life of victory; but it is a life of victory *in the battle*, not a life of deliverance *from the battle*. So many make so much today of God's ability to deliver the believer from the various trials of life. Of course He can, just as a parent can deliver a child from life's trials. He can hover over him, protect him, quarantine him and prevent him from coming in contact with the real world. The trouble is, *when he does come in contact with the real world*, the child won't know how to cope.

Yes, God can deliver us from life's unpleasanties, and He will if we badger Him enough or if that is all we have the faith to believe He can do. But my friend, quarantined Christians don't win many battles. Quarantined Christians don't claim many victories...except the dubious victory of having avoided the very conflicts God had designed to make them grow! That is why mature Christians will constantly be passing through the fires of life. Look at the Scriptures! The men and women in the Word who were men and women after God's own heart spent their lives doing battle with enemies...and winning.

The last time we walked in the steps of Jesus, He had descended from the mountain where He and His disciples had enjoyed a Bible Conference of unparalleled proportions. Just after that mountaintop, however, came immediate confrontation. A centurion with a slave on his deathbed became Jesus' first opportunity to demonstrate experientially the realities He had shared theologically on that hillside. There was no vacation at the beach to recuperate from the marathon seminar, just an immediate need to meet; and our Master, who was in the need-meeting business, took the time to do just that.

We take up reading in Luke 7:11 at that point:

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And the next day it came to pass that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and a great throng. Now when he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, one who had died was being carried out, who was his mother's only son, and she a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. So when the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity toward her and said to her, "Do not weep."

And he came close and touched the bier, and those who bore him stood still; and he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he presented him back to his mother.

Then fear took hold of all, and they began to praise God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us!" and, "God has taken notice of his people." And this story of him spread through all Judea and all the region round about.

(Luke 7:11-17 TLOCIS)¹

How often we read that phrase in the life of Jesus: *the next day* or *immediately*. Scarcely was there ever a time when the Master had a parenthesis in which He was not in great demand. And if you are letting God be God in you, chances are your life will get quite complicated as well. Your phone will ring a lot. Your appointment calendar will fill up, not just with meetings and events, but also with the names of people who need your time and your attention. "And the next day," it reads, Jesus *just happened to be* where there were deep, deep needs. And that, Beloved, is where the Spirit of God will lead *you* if you will relinquish control of your life and let Him.

But, oh, how we Christians complain when God simply does what we have asked Him to do! Now please listen carefully. If you have enlisted in the army of God and you have reported for special assignment as a soldier who wants to not only be in the army but in the battle, please don't rail at your commander-in-chief because He sends you to the battlefield. Don't whine and cry because the battle goes on.

The battle is supposed to go on until the enemy is defeated, and the enemy will not be defeated until the King comes in all His glory with all His saints to rule and to reign. Until He either sends for the church to meet Him in the air, or sends for you to take

¹ The Life of Christ in Stereo: The Four Gospels Speak in Harmony; by Johnston M. Cheney; © 1969 Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon

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you home...*if you have enlisted for the battle, put on the armor and stop complaining about the bullets and the bombs.* The bullets and the bombs are simply proof positive that you are where you belong. In this world, ye shall have tribulation...but be of good cheer, be delighted; be ecstatic; *God in you has overcome the world.* We live in a world filled with “woe-is-me” Christians. It is a world in which Christian leaders are blaming either God or our lack of faith for every sickness, every trial and every setback we suffer. Don't blame God. Praise God. Those trials are the results of the fall. The victories in those trials are the result of the grace of a loving God who cares. *The battle will go on, my friend,* and the fact that it does is simply proof that your Commander recognizes that you are His.

II- THE CRISIS WAS HOPELESS!

So Jesus was, from the moment He left His prolonged Bible class, in the heat of the battle. But how, you ask, could He get Himself into something as heavy as this? Here He is, walking with His disciples and a large entourage of bystanders into the city of Nain. He must have had a lot on His mind and certainly He had a crowded agenda. One thing there wasn't time for was unexpected interruptions. Right? Wrong! God in man *is never too busy to meet people with needs.* You may be asking, “Well, what will come into Jesus' life today? What could be more traumatic than a group of Jewish elders begging on behalf of a Roman centurion who wanted his slave boy healed from a terminal disease? How could the Master top that one?” Don't go away.

It says, “Now as He drew near the gate of the city, behold...”. Behold, indeed. The one thing you and I dread the most: a funeral procession. It ties up traffic. It reminds us of death, (something we want to forget). It causes us to have to face people who are grieved and lonely. In general, it brings nothing but gloom into our lives. Most of us will find any excuse in the world to avoid a funeral, particularly one like this. You say, “Well, maybe Jesus can just heal someone else and make someone else happy.” Maybe. But any way the human mind can grasp it, this situation would have to go down as a hopeless crisis. This boy was already dead. You and I would have cringed at the thought. Funny. The Living God living in Jesus and the Living God living in us simply delights in being confronted with the impossible. For when God confronts the impossible, man at last gets out of the way and lets God be God. If there's any chance that we can do it, we'll try. This

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was a hopeless crisis. Praise God! Those are the best kind for the Christian.

III- THE LORD REALLY CARES!

It is at this point in the story that I really begin to get excited. Now if you are not careful, you can concentrate on the surface issues in Bible stories and miss the character of God. It is, after all, coming to grasp the character of God that living the Christian life is all about. So whenever you read the life of Christ, look between the lines at how God responds to people and situations; that is, remember, how God in you wants to respond as well.

What is so exciting about this passage is that it reveals so beautifully the gentle, sensitive spirit of our God. Now Jesus obviously was confronted with hundreds of funerals in His ministry. He also obviously did not raise very many from the dead. It is appointed unto man once to die, the Scripture tells us. That is fact. For the Christian, it is an exciting fact. It means that we don't have to stay on the battlefield indefinitely. There is going to be a victory banquet one day the likes of which man cannot even comprehend. We will feast together with God in celebration of the fact that death is history, that life is eternal, that sin is behind us, and that it truly was worth it all. But between now and then, death is a necessary step to life.

So the healings of Scripture do not mean that God plans to heal everyone. The raising of the dead in Scripture does not mean that God never plans to let anyone die. This boy died...eventually. No, God had something deeper than that to demonstrate here. He wanted to demonstrate the amazing truth that the God of eternity, the One who framed the worlds, the One who holds them together by the breath of His power, the One who but speaks and universes shatter, the One who one day will utter His voice and the mountains will disappear and fire will devour this world and all that is in it; *that same God weeps when He sees a widow lose her son*. That same God stops in His tracks and lays everything He has planned aside when He sees one of His special ones hurting. My friend, *your God cares!* He cares that your heart is breaking. He cares that your home is crumbling. He cares that everything you have poured your life into seems to be vanishing before your eyes. *Your God cares!* He cares enough to cry. The Lord really cares.

Now look at the two things that so moved the heart of God.

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First, she was a widow. She had already suffered the loss of her husband and was left to live life alone. That broke the heart of God. You may be in that same condition, and you may have wondered in your lonelier moments if God really understands the hurt you feel. Beloved, your God cares! God's heart was moved at the plight of this woman. He was moved enough, as we shall see momentarily, to do something about it.

Secondly, she only had one child, and that child had been taken from her by death. That, too, broke the heart of God. You say, "How can you draw a conclusion like that?" The passage says it clearly. In the first place, there is absolutely no reason for those two statements to be in the passage otherwise. The Holy Spirit doesn't include anything in the Word that is not vital. Not only that, but the woman's condition is the reason given in the passage for Jesus' grief and consequently for His action. It says:

...one who had died was being carried out, who was his mother's only son, and she a widow;...

So when the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity toward her and said to her, "Do not weep." (Luke 7:12,13 TLOCIS)

Jesus didn't raise the boy to life because he was dead. He raised the boy to life because He looked in the eyes of a woman whose heart was broken. When He did, His heart broke as well. When Jesus raised Lazarus, it didn't seem so strange. Here was someone He loved like a brother, and those who were grieved He loved like sisters. They were like family. But this woman just happened to be passing by. She was just one of those unknown faces in the crowd. She was just like those hurting people who pass in and out of our lives each day. We so easily ignore them because (we justify) we don't know them. They're not our responsibility.

To Jesus, everyone with a need was His responsibility. It says: When the Lord saw her, He was moved with compassion (or pity). The word "saw" indicates here that He did not simply "see" her the way He "saw" the rest of the crowd. He "saw" her the way you "see" something when you suddenly become deeply aware of it. His eyes met hers, and He "saw" her grief. Then, "seeing her," He was moved with compassion. Literally that means His spirit was grieved at her grief. It is a word found many times in Scripture, and it has the connotation of taking another's grief or hurt with the intent of doing something to comfort that grief or soothe that hurt.

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In Matthew 15:32, Jesus had compassion on the multitude because they had “continued three days with nothing to eat.” He felt their hunger. His heart went out to them. He did something about it.

In Matthew 18:33, the wicked servant who had been forgiven then failed to forgive was admonished, “Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?” When the king had compassion on the debtor, He laid aside the debt. He did something concrete to demonstrate His pity. The one forgiven, however, when called on to do the same, failed to do so.

In Matthew 20, Jesus was confronted with two blind men who cried out for mercy. In verse 34, we read this: So Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes and immediately their eyes received sight and they followed Him. Jesus didn’t go home and cry because He had met two blind men. He had compassion. He reached out and touched them.

IV- THE LORD DOES SOMETHING WHEN HE CARES!

And so it is in this passage that Jesus now demonstrates His compassion to this unfortunate woman. He did three things:

First of all, He comforted her. It says this:

So when the Lord saw her, he was moved with pity toward her and said to her, “Do not weep.” (Luke 7:13 TLOCIS)

The first thing God did was speak to the woman and calm her fears. His tender voice enveloped the atmosphere, and suddenly the raging seas within her became calm. The Word of God entered the picture and once the Word went forth, fear vanished.

For God hath not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. (II Timothy 1:7 NKJV)

That’s the first thing God wants to do for you this very day, if you, like this woman, appear to be the victim of life’s “Job-like onslaughts.” He wants His Word to speak to you and settle you and comfort you and give you peace. In John 16:33, God Himself said this to us: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world, ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” The Word of God is the agent of God to give the child of God peace.

The second thing Jesus did was reach out and touch the

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circumstances that enveloped the lad. He came close, and He touched the coffin, and those who bore him stood still. The world always stands still when God reaches out and touches someone. He does not always do what the world expects. The world doesn't know what to expect when God touches men, but the world stands in awe when God moves into the impossible.

The third thing Jesus did was bring death out of life. A curse became a blessing. The very thing that had been a messenger of grief to a lonely widow, God turned into a vehicle of joy. He used a coffin, a funeral procession and a street filled with mourners as His backdrop to make Himself known. Beware, Beloved, that very crisis you are so grieved over, the thing you might be tempted to become bitter over is God's setting for a presentation of grace unlike any you have ever witnessed. Do like these people did. Stand still. God is about to touch you through the very thing Satan meant to defeat you...and bring to you joy unspeakable, peace indefinable and power indescribable!

Now at last, Jesus addresses the boy. The boy, remember, is dead. There is no hope. Enter the God who spoke the worlds into being:

and he said, "Young man, I say to you arise!" And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he (Jesus) presented him (the lad) back to his mother. (Luke 7:14b,15 TLOCIS)

From the ashes of defeat came victory. The God of eternity spoke directly now to the boy. And He only uttered one word! God need not preach a sermon to change your life. He has already done it all. All He need do now is say to you, "Arise!", and death will be swallowed up in victory once again. Don't try to explain away this miracle. To do that you must try to explain away God. It says, He that was dead sat up and began to speak. That's good enough for me. It was good enough for the boy's mother. It was good enough for the amazed crowd.

V- THE WORLD NOTICES WHEN GOD DOES SOMETHING!

Incidentally, this crowd responded the way the world always responds when God is allowed to be Himself. Then fear took hold of all, and they began to praise God. It would appear that the word "all" means "all"! There were no skeptics in that crowd. There were no doubters in that group. God had moved into an impossible situation and had calmed the hearts of anxious loved ones, spoken a word of peace, reached out and touched

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the situation with His presence and, finally, said that one, transforming word, "Arise!". From the coffin came life and from the very vehicle designed by the enemy to signify the end, came a new beginning. And the world, as always, was amazed.

It may be that your life, like mine, has experienced in recent days or months, times of great discouragement and trouble. Perhaps despair or even depression has resulted. The God who cares has a word from His Word for us today. It is a word of comfort. It is a word of encouragement. It is a word of praise! He has said at least four things to me. I trust He has spoken to you, as well. Here is what I believe He is saying today to some of us:

1- We belong to a God who cares! We belong to a God who knows full well the hurt we feel. He knows the loneliness and the grief. He knows the heart of a widow. He knows the fears of the orphan. He knows the rejection and disappointment of the afflicted. He knows. More than that, He has compassion. His heart breaks over our heartbreak, and because He has compassion, He plans to move in and do something about it. He plans to use the very things that brought us grief as backdrops for a demonstration of grace that will make us into what, in our heart of hearts, we want to be.

2- We have a Living Word that speaks peace to our hearts. When hearts are breaking, the last thing the flesh will want to do is bury itself in the Word. The first thing God would have us do, however, is just that. When the storms in your life seem to be raging out of control and no one seems to understand, your God who cares has a word of peace for you. Submerge yourself in the Scriptures. They alone will calm that storm and give you peace.

3- Once your heart has been calmed, expect God to act. He may not bring the dead to life. He may not even change your circumstances at all. He can, but He may not. But one thing is for certain: once you have allowed Him to speak peace to your heart, He plans to reach out in some way and touch you; and when He does, He will in some way say to you, "Arise!" He will tell you to throw off the robes of death you have been wearing. He will tell you to cast off the cloak of depression you are carrying and sit up and shout! He will have delivered you...not necessarily by changing what is happening to you, but by changing you through what is happening to you, and you will arise to a whole new level of power and peace.

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4- Once God has spoken and we have cast off the mantle of death and begun to live again, expect the world to take note. They have no hope. They have no Word. They have no peace. The same plagues that attack you overcome them! They have no solutions. When God speaks life to you, they will be amazed! They will, like this stunned crowd at the gate of the city of Nain, begin to praise God and proclaim, "God has taken notice of His people!"

So it is that God has a Word for His people. It comes from amidst the confusion of a pushing, shoving and wailing crowd. It comes from amidst the helplessness and hopelessness of a situation the world calls impossible. It is a word some of us need to hear today. It is a word some of us need to heed today. It is the one word that will one day wake the dead, shake the heavens and fill the skies with glory. Listen, Beloved, God wants to speak that word to you.

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For Study and Application

1- Re-read this passage from several translations. Now try to close your eyes and imagine yourself in that crowd. How would you have reacted to this stranger's grief?

2- What are your first thoughts when you are confronted with comforting someone who is grieving? How did Jesus deal with the woman's grief?

3- Using a concordance and a topical Bible, do a study in Scripture of everything the Bible has to say about widows. Can you draw any conclusions about the mind of Christ in this area? How did God's heart for widows carry over into the early church?

4- Do a study of the word "compassion". Does it mean more than a feeling? If so, using the example of Christ's compassion, how can we more effectively demonstrate that quality in our world? What can you do this week to respond as Christ responded?

5- If bitterness has permeated your life due to circumstances of life, ask God to forgive you. Bow before Him in humility and praise Him that He is a God who cares!

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