

Widow at Nain

1 Kings 17 v18-24 & Luke 7v11-16

Old Testament Bit.

25 years after Rehoboam & Jeroboam died. Commander Omri took power of Israel, and become one of Israel's greatest kings. He strengthened Israel through alliance & conquest and built Samaria. The OT says little except he was the most sinful in the eyes of God. Most sinful until his son took over after 12 years - Ahab, who was apparently even worst. He had a big Canaanite population in Israel and tried to unite them. To strengthen an alliance he had married a Phoenician princess, Jezebel. She wanted the Baal religion to be the only religion of Israel. No-one likes a Jezebel! [Name still used for some-one whose being unfaithful to her partner!] Time for a hero to challenge all this nonsense. Enter Elijah. Who goes up to the King, tells him that because of his Sin against Yahweh, there will be no rain until he Elijah says so. Just before he started running, he said that will be about 2-3 years probably – then legged it, and hid on the border with Sidon. He stayed in a small dwelling with a poor widow, who had only a tiny oil left to make bread with for her and her sons last meal. Elijah says put me up, and your oil will never run out and it didn't. Nice arrangement, until one day, her only son dies.

Do bible readings:- 1 Kings 17 v18-24

This miracle was shared from generation to generation, and Elijah became the symbol for the Prophets. In Jesus' time, he shone like a beacon in their troubled history. Some said the Messiah would surely be a new Elijah.

TALK

Vicar to children – what's grey and has a long tail – boy : 'I know the answer should be Jesus but it sounds like a squirrel'. In churches, preachers ask a lot of leading questions, where the answer is Jesus. But if I asked 'what's the pointless answer?'. You would probably not expect the answer to be Jesus. – but I am going to have a go over the next few minutes at showing that Jesus is **the** pointless answer? OK?

I love the TV quiz game 'Pointless' and I did my own survey where I asked 50 people to name a biblical miracle. One of the 'pointless' answers, one that no one said, is what we are looking at today and is one of my favourite miracles. We join Jesus today, still early in his ministry, we know that because John the Baptist is still alive. But he has already started doing miracles, including that one in the wedding party at Cana, which was the most popular answer in my survey.

Jesus has been on another journey, and has picked up quite an entourage on the way. Nazareth was in those days a mountainous hamlet, not a great place to centre your ministry, So Jesus picked on the much bigger fishing town of Capernaum, possibly because his first disciples Peter & Andrew lived there. He set off on foot from Capernaum (means The village of Nahum) and arrived 25 miles South at Nain (means Pleasant pastures). Why did he go to this town. It was common for itinerant preachers to go town to town declaring his Good News. So Nain may have been his ultimate destination. Or the Kev Elliott theory:- As it was only 6 miles from Nazareth, and although not a direct route, may have just been a good stopping off place, on his way home to see his family.

Nain is still there today, you can google it for images, and only about 2 miles as the crow flies from Nain is a town called Sulah, previously called Sechem. Sechem is the believed to be a possible location of the widow in Isaiah's story. They were neighbouring towns. Nain is almost on the site where Elijah's famous miracle took place. It would take Jesus all day to walk from Capernaum, so he would be arriving in Nain at dusk. If he had gone on to Nazareth he would be travelling in the dark, in the mountains. When I trekked up the Annapurna range in Nepal, my best Man big Jon (who was also on my Algeria trip with me) had miscalculated our destination distance, and our last hour trekking was in dusk then dark – quite scary. So he arrives at dusk, which was always the time of day for funerals.

In towns like Nain, the entrance or gate of the town, was the meeting place, where business was done, and a fair sized crowd would gather there. Going out of the town towards the burial caves was a large funeral procession. Large because the town had taken pity on the lady, who had lost her husband, and now lost her only son. The dead man would have been on an open bier. Its like a stretcher with the covered up body on – like body snatchers might use.

Coming the other way into town on the thin road was another large procession headed up by what looked like a rabbi, a holy man. The lady comes face to face with Jesus at the crowd at the gate. Plus the public mourners. Even the poorest in Israel were obliged to have at least 2 flutes and 1 wailing woman. There were people everywhere.

What is so bad about the ladies situation:- Her son was her safety and security. Little chance for a single women to get steady income., besides the occasional work as a professional mourners, that is. The other horror is that her family name comes to an end. We don't worry to much about the family name (although some do). To the Jews their ancestral names and lines were a big part of their identity.

We are told that Jesus has compassion. For who? Not the dead man, but for the widow. He tells her not to cry, then touches the dead man, which is not allowed by Jewish laws as it will make Jesus 'unclean'. He speaks to the dead man, and tells him to get up. The man gets up, much to everyone's utter astonishment. The man speaks thus proving he's alive. Then Jesus gives him back to his Mother. Why did he do that. They were right next to each other, he wasn't going to get lost! Its symbolic. She would have find it difficult to survive. With no husband or son, life would start feeling pointless for her.

There is much more going on here than a compassionate resurrection – amazing though that is. John referred to Jesus miracles as signs. This one was definitely that. A sign to the past. You sometimes get copycat killers. What the psychopath wants is for you to strongly identify him with another killer, as if he was him, or his direct replacement. James Holmes (Colorado cinema killings) had even been acting like the Joker (from Batman) in prison. This miracle was a copycat resurrection. A Widow loses her only Son, who is resurrected. The only time this has ever happened before in Jewish history was Elijah.

The town of Nain is only 2 miles from Sechem (Saloh) where Elijah's miracle took place. But behind the towns is Mount Tabor, which is believed to be the location for the Transfiguration. Who was seen on the Mount with Jesus .. Moses and ... Elijah ! This seems to be real Elijah territory.

There are differences though. Elijah pleads with God for his Spirit. Jesus confidently speaks the Spirit in to the boy. Elijah calls on God. Jesus demonstrates God.

Qumran dead sea scrolls was a great insight into fist century Jews they were confident that a great Prophet like Elijah would come back soon as the Messiah and trounce the Romans. They believed that Elijah had not died but been taken up to Heaven in a chariot in a whirlwind.. He would return and bring about a new peace. In the [Book of Malachi](#), Elijah's return is prophesied "before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord,"¹. It was an expectant generation, who not only knew well this miracle of Elijah, but were minutes from where it had happened. When they saw Jesus they could not help but see a new Elijah. Could this great prophet be the awaited Messiah?

But that was then, and the sign served its purpose well then. But is there a sign in this story for you personally? I think there could be. I think the miracle was not about bringing life back to the man, but was about bringing life back to his Mother. Saving her from a sorrowful and pointless existence. Its about compassion ,but about restoration, about a second chance, new hope.

Some of you will be struggling with a sense of loss or hopelessness. Jesus comes again, but this time to you as the life and resurrection. The widow had not physically died but had emotionally died, broken, given up. Sometimes you feel overawed and emotionally broken. There was no physical changes or physical healing to the woman but she was changed, a miracle had happened. Do I believe in miracles. Personally yes – occasionally physical ones like the Miracle of the widows Son at Nain, but perhaps they are rare. More often you see the miracle of the Widow at Nain,

that is much more common. There are many examples in this Church of God transforming lives that have hit rock bottom.

When you have reached rock bottom and feel that life is pointless. Jesus.. is the pointless answer, the answer to your needs in what feels like a pointless and hopeless situation. What do you need to do. Cry out to him. You don't need professional mourners, cast your burdens on him. He can take it. Let your anger and frustration out on him. He can take it. If you are able bodied then find a quiet spot on the hill, and make some noise, shout out, get it out your system. If your house bound or lazy, then find a small room when the house is empty and do the same. It won't change Jesus – he already loves you and wants to restore you, but it will shape you into a position where you are more honest to him, and thus more open to him, more receptive to his love.

Say “ Jesus is the resurrection and the life, for me. I am not physically dead (unless some of you have passed on unnoticed in the last 15 minutes) but I can be emotionally drained, stunned, or dead and need this resurrection power to restore me”. Call on Jesus and be healed. And if you know that your brother or sister is struggling, then you show them Gods love also, and help to be the resurrection and the life to your friend.

He can take you out of that place. Turn obstacles into opportunities, stumbling blocks into stepping stones & tragedies into triumphs.

If at times life is hopeless, if it feels pointless – Jesus is the pointless answer Amen

Water into Wine*	43
Raising Lazarus	38
Feed 5000	33
Widow at Nain's son	0
Miraculous catch of fish	2
Coin in Fish mouth	1
Leper	15
Paralysed man	10
Feed 4000	9
Walk on Water	20
Calm the Storm	13
Gadarene Demoniac	5
Jairuses Daughter	24
Syrophoenicians womans daughter	0
Deaf	8
Blind	28
Lame	5
Centurions Servant	3
Withered Hand	5
Withered Fig Tree	0
Woman with hemmorrhage	13
Jesus own Ressurrection	10

Scores are out of 50

The three most popular answers are in green. The pointless answers are in red. You can do this quiz with a small group. Each must think of a different miracle, but try and think of what would be the least popular answer. An incorrect answer scores the maximum of 50. Say you won't allow the birth of Jesus as a miracle. Score them as per the answers above. The winner is the one with the lowest score.