

Chapter 8

*Extracts from a sermon delivered by President Dwight,
entitled,
"The Youth of Nain"*

(Dwight's Sermons, Vol. II, p. 184)

In the preceding pages, allusion having been made to the above sermon, and in a manner calculated (we trust) to awaken the interest of our youthful readers, we shall give in this place some *extracts* from it, accompanied with our devout prayer that they may prove the means of the spiritual resurrection of many a youth, and indeed of everyone who may peruse them. The sermon is founded upon Luke 7:11-15.

Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. -- [NKJV]

"In the preceding part of this chapter we are informed that our Savior, entering into Capernaum, was entreated by a centurion, distinguished for his unrivaled faith and piety, to heal his sick servant. He accordingly healed him. The next day he left Capernaum to perform the duties of his ministry in other places. In his progress he passed through Nain, a city near to Mount Tabor and six miles from Nazareth. As he came nigh to the gate he met a funeral procession following a youth to his burial. This youth was an only son, and his mother was a widow. The family, it would seem, was greatly respected by the citizens, and the event excited an uncommon degree of sympathy, for we are told that much people of the city accompanied the mourning parent to the grave of her son.

"Our Lord, whose tenderness was supreme and whose benevolence was manifested on every proper occasion, was moved with compassion at the sight of this afflicted mother, and directed her to weep no more. Having said this, he came and touched the bier, upon which [action] the bearers stood still. Then with a solemnity and authority suited to his own character, and exhibited by him on every important occasion, he said, "Young man, I say to thee, arise." Accordingly he arose, and sat up, and began to speak. Our Lord then delivered him to his mother.

"This story is in many respects interesting and instructive. The very manner in which it is related is remarkably beautiful and affecting. It is told with the utmost degree of that

simplicity which is the prime ingredient in all fine narration. The circumstances are selected with singular felicity and are preeminently fitted to touch the heart. The miracle itself was of the most glorious kind conceivable. It was equally wonderful and benevolent. It was the first fruit of that divine power which will hereafter be displayed in a manner still more awful and amazing at the final day, "when all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man and shall come forth; they who have done good to the resurrection of life; and they who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation."

"It was a miracle clear of all objections. The occasion was casual. No concert between Christ and the people can be supposed. No harmony of designs or wishes can be suspected. The miracle was performed in the most public manner, before a great assembly composed of those who were either indifferent or hostile to the character of the Redeemer. The event was *unexceptionably miraculous*. The youth was dead, and was summoned back to life by a command. The facts were seen by this great multitude, and were acknowledged by them in a manner solemn, religious, and unequivocal. One would think, therefore, that the transaction would be received at once as a proof of the mission and the divinity of our Savior."

(Having stated it as his intention to consider the recall of this young man to life as symbolical of the spiritual resurrection of those young persons who are savingly wrought upon by the Lord Jesus, the President proceeds as follows.)

"1st. Every youth who is thus raised to life is, before this resurrection, spiritually dead.

"Do you receive this charge as untrue, as unkind, or even as doubtful? Look back, I beseech you, upon the whole course of your lives and tell me if you can remember a single day in which you have faithfully obeyed God, believed in the Redeemer, or repented of your sins. If you answer honestly, you will confess, in spite of all your wishes to the contrary, that there has been no such day in your lives. Let me ask you further, can you remember a single instance in which you have performed either of these duties? Has there been a single hour of your lives in which you have experienced such views and affections as the scriptures declare to be the true characteristics of the children of God? Have you ever for a moment loved God with all the heart? Have you ever chosen Christ as your Savior, and with cheerful confidence given yourselves to him as his disciples? Have you ever loved to hear his voice, to walk faithfully in his ordinances, and humbly to follow his example? Have you ever hated sin, mourned for it, confessed it before God, and resolved to forsake it? Have you actually and intentionally forsaken it for a single hour?"

"Have you ever esteemed the sabbath a delight, and the sanctuary honorable? Have you ever, even once, entered your closet, shut the door, and prayed to your Father who is in secret? Is there in the book out of which you will be judged a single faithful, fervent prayer of yours recorded--a prayer which you will be able to rehearse, and God to acknowledge, at the final day?"

(After presenting still further evidence in proof of the charge that youth by nature are spiritually dead, and representing their stupidity in consequence of that depravity as "deep, fixed, and dreadful," he proceeds to observe (directing his language more immediately to his youthful audience),

"2nd. There is still room to hope that among you there may in the end be found some youths of Nain; some who, though now dead and to the human eye lost and gone forever, may yet be restored to life.

"Suppose the divine Redeemer to be once more present in the world and to come into this assembly, to pass through yonder aisle and to say to one and another of the youths before me, 'Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.' What emotions would spring up in the minds of those who were neglected and forgotten? Would you then loll in stupid inattention, lay down your heads as if benumbed with the torpor of an opiate and sleep the sleep of death? Would you then turn the house of God into a chamber of amusement, cast a rolling stare around the assembly, whisper to one of your companions, laugh with another, and play tricks with a third? Or would you take out of your pocket a sportive book and waste the golden hours of life over a play or a novel?

"On the contrary, would not all the powers of your soul be awake? Would you not sit in dreadful suspense till the solemn calls were finished; and in more dreadful agitation when they were over, while Christ and hope withdrew together to return no more? What an awful alarm would the very news that he was coming sound in your ears! How strongly would the tidings resemble the sound of the last trumpet, calling the dead to awake to the final judgment! At his entrance, how would every eye be fixed on him in solemn amazement and bewildered terror. How would the ear listen and labor to catch his voice. How would the heart of him who was passed by beat and throb and heave with agonizing throes to behold one, and another, and another called, and no sweet life-giving sound addressed to himself. How fearfully would every new name seem to be the last, and leave on the mind no faint image of the despair awakened by the sentence of reprobation at the final day.

"But Christ is now present in this assembly. Hear his own words: 'Wherever two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' On this very design he is come. His great business here is to call one and another from the dead. He has in this land, he has in this seminary, actually raised multitudes from spiritual death and endued them with that life which is the beginning of immortal life in the heavens. In one place and another, immense multitudes have heard and obeyed his voice. All these have opened their ears to inhale the enchanting sound, and cried out with ecstasy, 'Lord, we will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.'

"But now, no alarms are felt concerning the state of death and ruin so generally experienced. No voice reanimates, no voice awakens this assembly. A paralytic torpor has

seized on their faculties and stopped the current of consciousness, motion, and life.

"The soul is asleep, the faculties are benumbed, the senses have lost their power of perception, the heart has forgotten to feel and the pulse to beat. All around is a charnel house--a place of graves, a region of silence, oblivion, and despair. He who beholds the scene is tempted irresistibly to exclaim, 'Can these dry bones live?'"

"The joy of heaven over repenting sinners has ceased to be renewed here. From this seminary no tidings of faith and repentance in those who inhabit its walks reach the world above. In that happy region, where the tidings of a returning sinner awaken a sublime and universal festival, all is solemn silence concerning us, accompanied perhaps with a despair of seeing their society enlarged by new accessions of sanctified minds from this once highly favored place.

"A small number of years only have passed away since this seminary was probably more distinguished for its piety in proportion to its numbers than any other at that time in the Christian world. Then this house was the most solemn as well as the most delightful place, and contained the most interesting congregation which I have been permitted to behold. Then the word of God, the good seed from heaven, was sown upon good ground, and sprang up, and bore fruit--thirty, sixty, and a hundred fold. It is now a 'wayside'--a stony ground, a plat of thorns and briers--where the good seed cannot spring, or, where if it springs, it cannot grow.

"Still there may be hope even concerning us. Our wilderness may yet become a fruit field.

"3rd. For the accomplishment of this great end, this restoration to spiritual life, it is indispensable that such as desire to be interested in it should begin a total change of their conduct.

"Look back upon your past lives, and you will want nothing to convince you either of the truth or the importance of this declaration. You will there see that you have hitherto taken no measure, no care, no thought to obtain spiritual life.

"But it is not enough for you to review your past life. Open your eyes in solemn prospect on the scenes before you. Your life will soon hasten to a close. You will soon be arrested by your last sickness and be laid upon the bed of death. Your hearts will cease to beat, your strength fail, and your eyes be closed in darkness. Your bodies will be carried to the grave and your spirits will return to the God who gave them. Think, I beseech you, think what it will be to meet your Judge, to give up your account, and to enter upon your retribution.

"All the measures which you have hitherto taken have not advanced you a single step towards eternal life. You have not yet entered 'the straight and narrow way which leads to that life.' How can you expect to find the gates of glory which open at its termination?"

You have not yet begun to serve God here. How can you expect either to be willing or permitted to 'serve him day and night in his eternal temple?' You have not yet begun to assume the temper of angels or of 'the spirits of just men made perfect?' How can you expect to become their companions forever?

"Alas, you have entered, you have gone far, you are now rapidly hastening onward in 'the broad and crooked road which leads to destruction!' In this progress you are satisfied, stupid, gay [carefree], sportive, undisturbed by conscience, and regardless of death and the judgment. On the brink of perdition, you sleep! The voice of mercy cries to you, 'Awake, O sleeper! and call upon thy God.' Half roused to consciousness, in the middle point between life and death, you feebly exclaim, 'Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep.' The voice of judgment will soon pronounce, 'He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.'

"Awake then, 'while it is called today.' Arise, stand upon your feet; ply the work of your salvation. Repent, believe, escape for your lives, or the night will be upon you in which you will sleep to wake no more."