

Death

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[0 : 00] Now, I would like us to look for a few moments this morning at this passage of scripture.

If you're visiting with us today, if you're here possibly as family or friends for the ordination or if you're just on holiday and you're here passing through, we believe you're here as an appointment by God. God has you here, as we all are here by God's appointment. We've been looking over the last few Sunday mornings in the summer at the Miracles of Jesus and looking at their relevance and significance and what they teach us and why they are included in the Gospel stories. Today, there's actually two miracles here.

We'll mainly focus on the raising of Gyrus' daughter, so the miracles about the defeat of death. Now, last week we met together and it was great and it seemed a very significant and relevant miracle that we looked at for the day and for what we were doing. You may wonder today, well, maybe it's not quite so relevant to be talking about death and resurrection and ordination of elders and deacons, but I think you'll find that this miracle takes us to the very core, the very heart of the Gospel of which these guys are going to become leaders in the church to declare and to be pastors and carers over, so I think it is very relevant. But I wonder whether you also might sometimes think, well, what have the miracles, what relevance do the miracles of Jesus have in my day to day life as I go from here to my very ordinary mundane day to day life? I don't see miracles like this happening in my life. What relevance do they have? Are they real? Are they fabled? Are they simply wishful filming from writers who wanted to have a Savior who was strong and powerful?

Absolutely not, and we've seen that they are pointing forward both to the death and resurrection of Jesus, but also to His finished work and what it means. These miracles all speak into the longings we have in day to day living, longings that everyone out in the street has as well, not just Christians. Everyone has these longings, longings for life to the full, plenty, satisfaction, joy, health. It deals, it speaks into our longings, it speaks also into our fears, fears of the reality of evil, of destruction, of illness and of death. All of these things, the kind of meta narratives of our lives are dealt with by the miracles.

Sometimes we don't think about them because we can fill our lives with minutiae. But when we sit down and sit back and think about these things, then these are the matters of everyday longings and everyday desires and everyday fears. And we find that Christ and His miracles are speaking into that. Christ and His miracles, but Christ in His person is relevant to every single heartbeat here. To every single second that we live, Christ is relevant and His message is relevant and His salvation is relevant to all of our lives and to every part of our lives. As we said last week, no secular sacred divide. Okay, He's relevant to all.

[3 : 45] So can we look at this story? I'm going to look at it kind of briefly because it's an easy story. It's a well-known story. The stories of Jesus, the miracles of Jesus speak for themselves, but we also see them as signs to spiritual truths. So this story of the healing of Gyroes or Jesus' daughter is set as a contrast. It's very interesting. It's set in a contrasting situation because we didn't read it, but previously Jesus had healed a man with a demon. You know that story of the demons being sent into the pigs and the people of the decapolis saying, go away. We don't want you here, Jesus. They were scared to death by what they'd seen.

And they said, look, you're messing up our nice quiet lives. Go. Leave this area. We don't want you here. And so the contrast is that these people have said, go away, Jesus. We don't want you. And in this chapter, we have gyros coming and falling at the feet of Jesus in great need, saying, Jesus, I want you and I need you to do something miraculous in my life. And so there's this amazing contrast set up as the story unfolds between those who didn't want Jesus and those who did want and who needed Jesus. And the reality is that that's what we find each time we come to scripture, each time that we are confronted with the truth and the challenges and the message of Jesus Christ in our lives that we can react in one of two ways, can't we? We can be afraid and say, no, Jesus, your message is too scary. It's dealing right to the very core of my heart and my being. I'm not sure if I can deal with that. And we don't want you. We close our minds. We might not publicly run out of the place. We might never say, Jesus, leave the area, leave my life.

But we can buy our closing our minds by closing our reason, by closing our intellects, by closing our hearts. We can be saying the same thing. Jesus, no, not me, not in my life.

And we can say that as Christians as well. No, this is a no entry area. This is what I want to be in control. Jesus, you're not welcome here. Or we can be like Jairus and the women in this story who are in great need and who want Jesus Christ and who recognize Jesus Christ and who admit to their need for Jesus Christ. So in many ways, each time we gather, each time you open the Bible, each time your heart or your conscience is challenged to think about the message of Christ. You have these two contrasting responses. So we see that as we're introduced to the story. We also see the ugliness of disease and death.

Isn't that true in the story? And that immediately taps into our day to day lives, doesn't it? Because we're confronted with the ugliness of disease and of death. Some of you may have come here today with very heavy hearts because of struggles and difficulties and disease among those that you love or the death of those who are close to you. And you've got this again, you've got this interesting 12 year experience. The daughter of Jairus is 12 years old and the woman who has this discharge of blood has had it for 12 years. She has eaten her life away. It has eaten her savings. It has eaten her dignity. It has eaten her whole life and she has nothing left. And it is a picture of ugliness and a horribleness of poverty and loss that sin and all of the reality of living in a broken world brings to us. It's devastating and it's universal. And we would be foolish to ignore that reality in our lives today. And we'd be foolish to think that it's either something that we can conquer on our own or we will just bury our heads in the sand when we consider it.

[8 : 11] So this miracle speaks into the ugliness of disease and death. But it also speaks of the majesty of Jesus. It's a great miracle that speaks into, there's so much and I'm not, I can only touch on one or two things. And you will probably notice many more things than I notice about Jesus here. Just his condescension, his willingness to have his life and have his day to day routine broken into to help people in great and serious need. His concern even by this stage is growing reputation as someone unique, someone special, someone who could be approached to perform such remarkable acts of power. His authority is unfolded in this story over disease and over death. He has the authority to declare peace. He says that to those who are in need here. His tenderness and his grace, his works and his words in this passage speaking into ordinary lives. Isn't that great? Isn't that why it's so good to look at a passage like this today? Because I'm ordinary, you're all ordinary, probably. I know there might be someone very extraordinary here, I don't know. But probably our lives are pretty ordinary and we think we're pretty ordinary. Maybe think we're too ordinary even for Jesus to consider to be interested in. But here is the words and the work and the majesty of Jesus breaking into ordinary lives. An ordinary, poor, lonely, isolated woman and a little girl who we know neither of their names. And the miracles of

God that are as simple as here, we'll look at in a minute. The miracles of Jesus Christ here are the stuff of ordinariness. They're not kind of pie in the sky nonsense. It's not some esoterical discussion that you can have about the nature and the power and the abilities of Jesus. The miracles of Jesus are the stuff of ordinariness worked into people's ordinary lives who were in great need. And because they are signs, they will speak to us. And the miracle also in the story speaks of the nature of faith. Obviously here we have these miracles working into the context of healing and of resurrection. Not like Jesus' resurrection because obviously the little girl grew up and presumably grew old and then died again. But nonetheless, resurrection took life here. And there's, I think, a great deal of misguided teaching about healing and what healing is. And I'm going to be guarded by what I say here because I recognize and know that God is the living God and God will and I'll go on to say and does heal people. But sometimes there is misguided teaching that would seem to correlate the amount of faith or a dependence on the amount of faith of the person that will qualify them for healing. So that sometimes people will in a misguided way saying, well, you're not healed because you don't have enough faith in Jesus. You should have more faith because if you had more faith, Jesus would heal you. And so a great burden and a great pressure is put on the individual to somehow work up more faith.

And they feel greatly inadequate because they don't have what they regard as enough faith in order to be healed. So what we have is actually faith in faith rather than faith in Jesus.

And that can become very destructive and very self-centered and very burdening on us as if we somehow need to earn our healing. And if we're not healed, we haven't earned it before God. It's another form of legalism. But Christ can and Christ will and Christ does heal people. But His ultimate healing for us is still to be fully revealed. He's sovereign and He does answer our prayers. But sometimes in this life He won't heal us because as we've seen in many other passages of Scripture, He has a higher purpose for us, not only a deeper and future healing, but also a spiritual healing now. Sometimes He wants us to just hold on and trust and deepen and strip back our faith and trust so that we heal Him even in darkness and even in illness and even in pain. However, faith is crucial if we are to understand and if we are to experience and know the healing power of Jesus spiritually and the movement from spiritual death to spiritual life. And faith is very important in this story. Faith is really important in this story. Both Jairus and the woman who comes to be healed in the crowd, both have great faith in Jesus. Both have courage in different ways. The synagogue ruler, he falls at His feet of Jesus in public.

There's a great act of courage and faith. And both of them fall at His feet in different ways certainly. And obviously the woman probably, I don't mean some people say she was afraid, she didn't have much courage. She had great courage. But she had an illness that was difficult in public and it isolated her. She didn't want to draw attention to that. But she had great courage and trust in Jesus that even if she touched Him, she would be healed. Both confess their need. Both are in horribly impossible situations. Desperate, needy. You can just see Jairus, can't you? Coming my only daughter, 12 years old, is dying. And of course in the midst of the story, servants come and say, don't bother the master anymore. She's gone, she's dead. Jesus ignores that. But both had great faith. Both were afraid, both listened, both were healed or lived. And it's interesting to note in this situation, it wasn't even the daughter's faith that was being rewarded at that level. The faith was the father's faith here. And I just put that in by the way. Some were bewildered, some laughed at it and said, you know, you're a crazy man. Some misunderstood completely and some were completely astonished. I wonder what our reaction is to this miracle and to the ongoing teaching of Jesus. Jesus knows it all. And he's not afraid in his word to express that some did laugh at his claims that the little girl was sleeping and not dead and thought he was a crazy man. And we know many people still think Jesus is a crazy man. I hope you don't. And I hope that as Christians in our lives, we profess him and what he has done in our lives in such a powerful but ordinary way that it can be something that challenges those who think he's a crazy man. So we've seen the kind of miracle, the story that was happening. What really is the sign? Because John's Gospel, last week we saw that the

[16:17] Gospels, miracles were signs that Jesus performed that were pointing forward to his work and to his witness. And so here I just want to spend a moment or two speaking about the sign of this miracle, particularly the raising of Gyrus' daughter and focus on that because it's at least two things that it's a sign of pointing forward to the work and witness of Jesus Christ as he went on to the cross at Calvary. And the first is that death is not the end. It seems so final, doesn't it? When the little girl dies, that's it. And if any of you have a close people, people close to you die, it's very final, isn't it? They don't come back. It doesn't happen that it comes back. And yet, so the secular humanistic philosophy seems authoritative when it says, well, when you die, there's nothing, that's it. Nothing else happens. There's no truth outside of our material existence.

That's all there is. We are flesh and blood. And when we die, when our heart stops pumping, that's it. We cease to exist. And that is very much the thinking of the underpinning much of the thinking of today's society and must indeed be the underpinning of humanistic evolutionary foundations because that's all we are, flesh and blood. No soul, no real understanding of consciousness whatsoever, and no acceptance of absolute truth. And yet, Jesus blows these presuppositions out of the water by raising this girl from the dead because it points forward to something far greater that he was going to do. His words and his work challenge us to consider something that we're all very uncomfortable considering, which is death and maybe our own death, or even someone else's death. Death is not the end because the sign is that Christ went on. And right from the very beginning, you know, we saw that last week at John's Gospel, behold, the Lamb of God that comes to take away the sin of the world. Christ came to defeat death and his miracles are different signs that point to the healing and to the hope and to the provision and to the answer, the rescue of Jesus Christ. Christ came, he died on the cross innocently as God in our place with death and eternal death being the price of our own rebellion against God and against sin, but we can't provide that, so we can make ourselves, Jesus Christ does by his innocent life and yet by his death as one who was, as it were, guilty before God. And his resurrection on the third day was different from this little girl's resurrection. It was different from the resurrection of Lazarus where he took him from the tomb because this is Jesus rising on the other side of death, having defeated its power and its tremendous sting. Not really for himself because he was always going to be able to do that, but on our behalf so that when we put our trust in him that we know and we can have peace and forgiveness and the defeat of death, which is the sentence of God's justice against us for our sins.

So death in reality is a spiritual problem that Jesus Christ came to deal with. I have come to offer you life and life to the fool and that means life where the sting of death has been removed. Even though we die, the New Testament says, yet shall we live. So it's amazing, it's absolutely core to the gospel. What we have here in this miracle takes us to the very core of the gospel, which is the cross, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And without the resurrection, we have nothing whatsoever. There is no point in any of what we do if there is no resurrection. We're to be more pitied than anyone in the whole universe. We're gathered like a group of nutcases here if we're worshiping a dead God, a God who wasn't raised on the third day, a God who isn't alive and for whom the first day of the week is irrelevant, we recognize and see that he has spoken in his life and transformed us by his grace. And so we see it as a sign. And lastly, as I close, we recognize also the significance of the sign and of the miracles. And briefly, what I want to do just quickly is to take the two sentences that Jesus spoke here and apply them in significance to ourselves. And in verse 36, when he's speaking, he says to Gyru, but overhearing what they said, you know, that don't come to the house, why but trouble the teacher anymore, your daughter's dead. Overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, do not fear, only believe. Don't be afraid, just believe. And I think that word of Jesus speaks into our lives today, just as much today as it did then. Our situations might be completely different. But he says, look, don't be afraid, just believe. And you might be here today, you might not be a Christian. You might have come to church for a long time, but you've never given your heart to Jesus Christ and committed to him. You might be here for the first time, I don't know. But if you listen to the word of God and you know that God is living, then hear his voice and allow him to deal with your fear. Because

I'm sure lots of us, and there might be some matchless, strong, brave men here who might not say anything but who deep down inside might be very afraid. Afraid of the cost of commitment to Jesus Christ, afraid of what the commitment itself means, afraid of what your friends will say if you become a Christian, not case. Afraid of the lifestyle changes that might be involved, that you will follow Jesus and serve him. Listen to the word of Jesus, don't be afraid, only believe. Take the step of salvation and trust in him because he comes to bring joy and he comes to bring life to us. And that's the same for us all as Christians. There might be others who are here, we've been Christians a long time, but who are absolutely terrified for some reason today. We have hidden it well from everybody, but please hear the voice of Jesus Christ saying don't be afraid, only believe. Every single Sunday morning, I'm in that room terrified, so I hear his voice, don't be afraid, just believe. And then in verse 41 he says to the little girl, little girl, I say to you arise or little girl, get up. And he's commanding her, it's sweet and gentle voice isn't it, but he's commanding her to not stay dead. And he says rise, get up, follow me. And can

I just give that same encouragement to all of us also, to be people who arise and get up and follow Jesus. We're all prodigals, you know, all of us are prodigals. And you know the great rejoicing in heaven when the prodigals came to faith because he said that he was dead and he's alive again. He was lost and he's found. We were all in that condition and if as Christians we've moved from there then let's live in that new place. Let's arise and get up and follow Jesus. We're alive in Christ. We're no longer dead in our transgressions and sins as Colossians 2, 12 says. Give thanks as we're encouraged to do for the protection and the provision and the life and the forgiveness and the love and the future and the hope that we have. Office bearers you're getting called to come and lead in the church. Get up, arise, take your duties and your responsibilities and your privileges seriously and know that you follow Jesus Christ. Dispel the shadows of death and of a life of death and sin from which we have been redeemed and rescued. Ground your lives and I must ground my life in the word and in the touch of Jesus Christ. Jesus here uses his word to speak and his touch to comfort and we have a look for his spiritual touch. We don't have the physical touch but we look for the spiritual touch. And sometimes we look for the physical touch of other Christians to encourage and hug and build us up in our lives. Dispel the shadows. Live as citizens today. Transform and transforming. As we get up in his youthful light, I think it's a very important part of the death narrative and the resurrection narrative of the gospel. Because in 2 Corinthians 4, 16, it tells us that even though we're getting older, yet inwardly we're being renewed day by day. Some of us are getting older than others. But I hope we're all getting renewed inwardly day by day by the Holy Spirit's power. As Christians say, I don't care what age you are, I hope that as Christians you are young at heart. And I must say the over 50s, and includes me here, are, well, maybe it doesn't, it does include me in age, maybe it doesn't in attitude, but are very young at heart. And are growing younger in all the glory of what that means as a Christian. You know what it means? It means that we're not just falling into the old cycle of getting old and grumpy and dying. Because we're being renewed day by day by the power and the energy and the grace of God. Youth, you know, we're very privileged here to have a lot of young people. And what is it to be young? It means to have energy. It means to be hungry to learn.

[26 : 54] It means to be enthusiastic, joyful, a degree of innocence. That's what should mark our Christian life the older we get. That's what it means to be renewed day by day. It means we still are youthful in our attitudes and thinking spiritually. So we don't become cynical as we get older and weary and grumbling, which sometimes can go with old age, not here. I hasten to add. But let's have that youthful being renewed day by day. So the old age is just, it's just part of living. And we're going to shed this old broken body and we're going to be given a renewed one. And then, as I close with future hope, you know, there are signs, aren't they? There are signs of a kingdom that's to come. We've seen that all the way through. And the resurrection is a sign of the future, the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwells righteousness that Jesus is coming to prepare us for. A place that is death-free. Isn't that the great thing? That's what the sign is here of the miracle is that the future is going to be death-free. You've seen the no mores and revelations, no more separation, no more grieving, no more tears, no more illness, no more violence, no more evil, hatred and death. All of the things we long for will be or long not to be there, will not be in this new heavens and new earth, wherein dwells righteousness, that place of hope and joy and fulfillment and resources and plenty and life. That's what the resurrection and this miracle of resurrection points forward to and it's glorious. And it can't be, whatever Jesus is to us, He can't be insignificant.

Or He can't be unimportant. You can reject Him, you can accept Him, but He can never be unimportant. And it needs to be that as Christians we recognise and we seek in this church to recognise how important He is and seek forgiveness when we shove Him into the back corridors of our lives. Because what He has done is so significant and so important and so perspective changing for us because He's taken us from death to life. Amen. May God bless to us our thinking on these miracles today.