Every now and then an event happens that is so tragic it redefines who we are. It changes the way we live and the way we think. For example, it’s been 10 years since the September 11th attacks, and today our minds are drawn back to those events. In the 9/11 attacks we learned that death shows no prejudice. Death shows no mercy. And we were reminded just how fragile life really is.

Truthfully, the only thing unique about the 9/11 attacks was the way death came, not that people died. People have been dying almost since the beginning of time. And people will continue to die until our Lord brings an end to time. Today or tomorrow or the next day you will probably read about some person who was killed suddenly and without warning; struck down in the prime of their life. And the same reality will grip your heart then as it did 10 years ago; that death is real; it can come at any moment and without any warning. Death, it seems, has taken us captive.

Death is something that is talked about in hospitals or nursing homes, not in our homes, at work, or in our schools. This is why we become so upset when death invades our lives. We’re uncomfortable talking about it, thinking about it, or watching it happen on our televisions. Death out in the open reminds us that no matter how hard we try, it cannot be managed or controlled. Death cannot be restrained or contained. Death will come to all of us no matter how hard we try.

Death is inevitable. Had the attacks on 9/11 not happened, every one of those who died 10 years ago would have died eventually. Had we stopped the planes that morning we would not have cheated death, we would have just saved it for another day. This is why sudden, tragic death makes us stop for a moment. In that September catastrophe we were reminded that in a moment we too could find ourselves taking our last breath. The very thing which claimed the lives of those on 9/11 will one day claim us as well. And our mortality scares us. The thought of death still hold us captive. But what if there was no ending? What if death did not hold us captive? What if we learned that there is someone willing to rescue us from death? Wouldn’t that change the way we live; the way we think of death?
One day Jesus and His disciples traveled to the village of Nain, about 20 miles southwest of Capernaum. And the events that unfolded that day redefined the way people lived. The date marked a change in their history. People were so impacted by the event that years later they were still talking about it. And when a traveling historian comes to town, they are able to relate the events as if they had just happened yesterday (Read Luke 7:11-17).

It’s easy to identify with the widow in this story. Most of us are familiar with death. We understand the pain and loss associated with death. And just like 10 years ago today, death had come unexpectedly and inconveniently to this house. This would be a day remembered for loss and pain. This would be a day remembered for death. At least that’s what this widow was thinking. That’s what the people from town were thinking. That is, until they met Jesus. As the funeral procession is leaving town, they meet Jesus and His disciples. Filled with compassion, Jesus heals her son and gives him back to his mother; a very powerful miracle that few people miss. However, it was not the miracle of restored life that made the town of Nain stop that day. It was the way Jesus performed the miracle. This boy lying in the open casket was touched by the hand of the Master.

Seeing the crowd, seeing the tears, and seeing death, Jesus walks up to this casket and touches death. This shocked the crown so much that the men carrying the casket stop. They stopped because nothing like this had ever happened before. Death meant defilement. Death was unholy. No religious leader, no priest, Rabbi, Levite, or any man of God would even think of touching death. A person was unholy for 7 days if they touched death (The one who touches the corpse of any person shall be unclean for seven days. - Numbers 19:11). The people of town probably expected Jesus to move as far away from death as possible, lest he be defiled and become unholy. But not Jesus. Jesus drew near to death. Jesus reached into death and touched this boy. Calling to him while he was still held captive by death, Jesus tells him to arise. And death obeyed. Death released one it held in its grasp. Death could not overcome the touch of the Masters hand nor refuse His command.

Death is a stain we all wear. It is the mark of our sin, says the Apostle Paul. “For the wages of sin is death.”(Romans 6:23a). Whether we are willing to admit it or
not, we all die because we all are sinful people. “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard”. (Romans 3:23).

Like the widow and the people from her village, too often our eyes are fixed on death, not on the One who can overcome death. The tragedy from 9/11 was not that many people died that day, but that many people were not prepared to face death. Their day began like any other; their minds on life, not death. And yet death still held some of them captive. The tragedy that day was that there were probably some who were still held captive by death even while they were still alive. However others lived even though they died simply because they had been touched by the hand of the Master.

Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die.” (John11:25-26). Jesus speaks of a life after death. Jesus assures us that through Him death no longer holds us captive. Because of the touch of the Master’s hand, all those who believe in Him have been freed. Just as Jesus rescued the widow’s son from death, He will rescue all who believe.

If we’re going to look back at the events from 10 years ago, let’s not spend time remembering death. Let’s learn the lesson that death can come quickly and suddenly. It can come without warning. It can come before we are prepared. Death can come before we’ve had a chance to be touched by the hand of the Master. Yes, all of us bear the stain of sin and the curse of death, yet in spite of this stain; this blemish we all wear, Jesus still reaches out and touches us. “But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!” (Ephesians 2:4-5). And although death is the result of sin, “the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord”. (Romans 6:23b).

The master still reaches out His hand. Jesus still reaches into death offering life to all who will accept it. While we are still alive, we have this offer of eternal life. Then when death comes; when death rises against us, it no longer holds us captive. We have already been freed by the touch of the Master’s hand.