If you were asked to give a definition for faith, what would you say? Is it a gift of God? Your ticket to salvation? Is it the power for godly living? Is it just a wish for something better in the future? Is it the opposite of science or fact or truth? Some of these are good answers and some are not. Even the not-so-good ones have a grain of truth to them. But it is not our job to come up with a definition, it is to seek the definition the Bible gives.

Many point to Hebrews 11 for a definition: **Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.** If you had to put that into your own words, you could do a lot worse than saying: **Faith is confidence in a promise of God.** When we talk about saving faith, we are talking about the confidence in the Lord’s promise to rescue us from hell based only on what Jesus has done for us. Last week, we had an of example of faith: the Roman centurion learned of Jesus’ past miracles and had heard of his compassion. So he also had confidence Jesus would care enough for his servant to use that miraculous power to heal him. This faith, this confidence in God’s power, is what we want to talk a little more about today. Will it stand the test in the face of death?

Times had been tough for the woman in text. She had seen her share of heartache and difficulty, and then some. She was a widow. That meant she had already grieved over the death of her husband and followed a wailing crowd to his grave. We also hear: **A dead person was being carried out - the only son of his mother.** This dead man was her only son. Just the fact that he was her only son hints at more heartache. If he was the only one, had she lost children before and he had been the only one left? Or maybe he was the only child she had! Especially in those days, they did not just view children as a gift from God. Children were a great honor and privilege and they saw large families as a special indication of God’s blessing. No children would be a disgrace, and only one would be the greatest treasure in her world. But now he was dead. What greater grief could there be?

But this sad day would not be the end of her troubles. In many ways, they were just beginning. Her livelihood was dependent on her husband and her son. Her husband had died which made things hard, but now her son was dead too which made things nearly impossible for her. There was no way for her to make a living in that society. Now she would have to live on any savings they had accumulated. Once that was gone, she would have to live off the charity of others. In a way, the crowd that went with her wept for her as much as they wept with her.

The leader of this large crowd from the town was none other than death self. He invites grief and sorrow, loneliness and pain, fear and uncertainty to join him. They travel along with this large crowd from the town of Nain. They embrace the widow who grieves for her only son. But another large crowd meets this one at the city gate, and it is the Lord of Life who leads them.

Jesus was coming from Capernaum where he had just healed the centurion’s servant. Most likely the very next day, he came to Nain only a few miles away. His miracle for that servant got quite a bit of attention. He traveled with his disciples and a large crowd had gathered around him. What a difference between this crowd and the one they meet! Here was happiness and excitement. Here was power and peace. Here was life and life to the full.

So what happened when life and death collide at Nain’s gate? Luke tells us: **When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her.** Luke calls Jesus the Lord. In the New Testament, the word Lord reminds us of the ultimate power and authority Jesus has. Here we see just how powerful he is! He dealt with her in compassion. His heart felt her pain and
had a desire to help her. Without anyone saying a thing, he turned to her and said: Don’t cry!

But how could Jesus say that? Her son was dead. Her confidence in God’s goodness wavered. Why did all this happen? Why had the Lord taken her son away? Why had he not used his power to stop this? You can easily understand her tears. Many of us have not had to bury a child; although some of you have. But I do not think we need to share the widow’s experience to understand the uncertainty in her thoughts. We believe in Jesus as our Savior. We have confidence his perfect life counted for us. We have confidence his perfect payment for sin on the altar of the cross counted for us. That demonstrates the Lord of life deserves our trust. That confidence in Jesus as the Savior also leads to a confidence in other matters. The Lord will take care of us. He will provide for us. He will protect us. He will work all things for our good. He will welcome us to an eternal home.

That confidence, that faith, comes easily when everything is going well. But what happens in hard times? When the Lord is not providing for us in the way we think he should? When he has not kept bad things away? Yes, we still believe in Jesus as our Savior from sin, but these times can shake our confidence in God’s care for us.

The greatest confidence shaker of all is death, truly the king of terrors according to Job. Death forces us to wrestle with impossible questions. It reminds each of us: sin has consequences. One day I will see Jesus face to face, and I will have to give an account for my sin. The widow knew this. The death of her son declared it. We learn the same lesson every time we read an obituary or drive by a cemetery or attend a funeral, or whenever we face a serious illness and finally draw near to our grave.

You cannot sweet-talk or reason with death. You cannot buy off death with money or good deeds. You cannot overpower death with the strength of your will, and you cannot ignore it. Death is the ultimate reminder of sin and the inevitable end of life. Death holds your sin up to your face and forces you to confront it in all its ugliness. You can do nothing to stop it. What happens to faith then?

In the face of this most severe obstacle to your confidence in him, the Lord of life deserves your trust. He will take care of you just as he took care of this widow and her son. Only your Lord has an answer to give in the face of death. Sin gives death a rightful claim over us, for here and eternity. The Lord’s answer to death was to remove the basis for its claim on us: sin.

The Lord wrote his answer in blood, shed from a cross. Jesus himself collected your sin from you. He carried it to the cross. There he let death make its rightful claim. But it claimed him, not you. There he paid what your sin earned and the Father accepted his payment for sin on your behalf. Once he paid for sin, death’s claim expired. So Jesus could not remain in the tomb. He rose and proclaims in victory: I am the living one; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and hades.

The Lord holds the power over death. He demonstrated that power to widow and everyone else in the crowds that day. We are told: Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, Young man, I say to you, get up! The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. The Lord of life proved he is deserving of our trust even in the face of the fiercest obstacle. He even used this death to proclaim that truth to all who followed him from Capernaum and to all who were following her to the cemetery.

What effect will death have on your faith, on your confidence in your Lord? Is it the end of your relationship with loved ones? Is it the most terrible consequence of sin? Is it to
be feared above all things? Is it cause to lose hope?

Not for you who place your confidence in Jesus who cared enough for you to take your place on the cross! He holds the keys of death and hades. He uses even death to care for you. He uses death to turn your hope of heaven into reality. He uses death to deliver you from a sin corrupted world to the paradise of heaven. **Don’t cry,** because he uses death to bring you to him and to your loved ones. The Lord of life deserves your trust; confess it with St Paul: **For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Amen.

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