

The Compassionate Lord Of Life

Luke 7:11-17

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In Luke 7:11-17, Luke said, “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...” that’s our subject “...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. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen up among us’; and, ‘God has visited His people.’ And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.”

It is no surprise that Luke, in his Gospel, records this story of the raising of the widow’s dead son. Why? Because it is consistent with the theme of the book of Luke. In it, Jesus is presented as the Son of Man in His humanity. He has been shown to be compassionate and kind. Luke’s theme is that “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). So in this story we see the compassion of Christ and the power of Christ come together to bring back to life a dead son of a widow. What a marvelous miracle indeed it is! So it is consistent with Luke’s Gospel.

And to be clear here, Luke’s is the only Gospel that records this story; it’s not in Matthew, Mark or John. It’s not mentioned anywhere in the synoptic Gospels—only in Luke.

In this story, we see Jesus and His compassion and power over death. In Hebrews 13:8, it says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” It means He doesn’t change. The theological term for that is “immutability.” Only God is completely immutable and doesn’t change. We change but God never changes. So the same Jesus who raised Jairus’ daughter, who raised Lazarus and who raised the widow’s son is alive today. He has the same compassion, the same power, the same care and the same ability to save us and to deliver us.

What pain Jesus must have felt in His sinless heart! When Jesus had compassion, He felt it perhaps more acutely than anyone else, because He had no selfishness and no sin. Sometimes what keeps us from being compassionate to other people is that we are self-centered and self-focused. So we are not really compassionate toward others. Jesus, on the other hand, was the pure, holy, sinless Son of God. So in His humanity, He felt the pain of this poor widow, and He gave her this marvelous miracle.

Someone described compassion as “your pain in my heart.” I like that. Pity, on the other hand, weeps and walks away, but compassion comes to help and stay.

By the way, when it says that Jesus “had compassion on her,” it’s in the verb form. So He was

actively involved in feeling in His heart and in doing something about this woman's plight and situation.

In this story, there are four truths I want us to see as we break down this narrative passage. First, we see the great sorrow that sin has brought into our world, verses 11-12. "Now it happened, the day after...." Luke uses a non-defined date here. He is saying, "It came to pass." He's not saying, "Once upon a time in a far-away land." This is historical narrative, but we're not sure exactly how long before it came to pass. The text indicates "the day after." "The day after" what? It seems to be the day after Jesus healed the Centurion's servant, in verses 1-10.

In this section of Luke, we see a series of miracles showing Jesus' compassion and power to heal. So this is the second miracle in this section. But there is an interesting contrast between the two miracles, the healing of the Centurion's servant and the healing of the widow's son. Someone said that one was a Gentile and the other was a Jew, one was a slave and the other was a son, one was performed at a distance and the other on the spot, one on behalf of a master and the other on behalf of a mother, one by request and the other unsolicited, one delivering from death and the other delivering from the dead.

Notice verse 11: "He went into a city called Nain." This is the only place in the Bible that mentions this city. There isn't a lot of archeological evidence as to where it is located, but in Bible times it was believed to be about 25 miles southwest from where Jesus was in Capernaum. And it was about 15 miles southwest of Nazareth on the plains of Jezreel.

So if He did this miracle the day after healing the Centurion's servant, He would have gotten up the next morning and took a 25-mile walk. I want to sit down just thinking about it. Whenever I hear the word "exercise," I sit down until the thought goes away. I don't like to walk. I certainly don't run. I don't know why anyone would; we have cars.

And it doesn't tell us in this story why Jesus went to Nain. We know of no purpose, intention, design—other than God's providence, because there was a widow in Nain, who was in a helpless situation, and God orchestrated this miracle that would take place.

I want you to note a repetition here. Verse 11 says, "Many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd." I point that out because at the end of verse 12, it says, "And a large crowd from the city was with her." So you have a big crowd with Jesus going into the city, a big crowd with the widow coming out of the city and the two come together. The prince of life meets the face of death, and a miracle is going to take place.

Verse 12, "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." Twice in this story; here and in verse 15, it says that he was "dead." There are no degrees of death; there's no such thing as "super dead" or "extremely dead." There are degrees of decomposition and decay once you die, but dead is dead. So you're either alive or dead.

I emphasize that because this was an actual miracle of Jesus raising a man from the dead. This is the first recorded miracle of Jesus raising someone from the dead. And the reference, in verses 11 and 12, to “many of His disciples” and to “a large crowd” and “a large crowd from the city was with her” shows us there were many eyewitnesses to this miracle. It wasn’t done secretly or in a hidden corner. Many people saw this marvelous miracle that Jesus performed.

And we know the boy was dead. I read one commentary that said he wasn’t really dead. It was just a miracle of diagnosis; Jesus saved him from being buried alive. No way! The story is very clear that he was dead. And I have no problem with God in the flesh raising someone from the dead. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1), so why can’t God take someone who is physically dead and call him back to life?

When Jesus raised someone from the dead—He raised this widow’s son, He raised Jairus’ daughter and He raised Lazarus—He brought them back into their mortal bodies. This wasn’t a resurrection into a new body, so unfortunately, they had to die again. You have a blessing, but you’re brought back—what a bummer!—and you have to go through it all over again. They would have to die a second time. When we are resurrected into our glorified bodies, we will never, ever die. We will spend eternity in our new, glorified bodies.

there are two crowds. In verse 11, there is one, joyful crowd traveling with Jesus. It consists of His disciples and many people. The second crowd, verse 12, was sorrowful, and no doubt they included the professional mourners, the wailers, the weepers. So Jesus met this sorrowful crowd.

In those days, they would bury the body immediately when someone died. When Jesus raised this son from the dead, he probably had been dead only a couple of hours. When He raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead, she probably had been dead only a few minutes. But when He raised Lazarus from the dead, he had been dead for four days. When Jesus said, “Take away the stone” (John 11:38), Lazarus’ sister, Martha, said, “Lord, by this time there is a stench.” He was really decomposing.

We know the three people Jesus raised from the dead were really dead. And Jesus raised them all by the power of His word. What marvelous miracles they were!

The text does not tell us why Jesus went to Nain. I can’t help but believe it was because of God’s providential plan and purpose for the salvation of this widow, for helping her in her helpless state. He providentially cares for us, and He was orchestrating this situation in which Christ would be coming into the city at the same time the other crowd was coming out of the city. If you are a widow, you’re burying your only son and on your way to the cemetery, who better to run into than Jesus Christ!

Now this miracle wasn’t performed in response to a request or a petition; no one said, “Heal my son. Raise my son from the dead.” It arose from the compassionate heart of Jesus, the Son of God.

I can't imagine what it must be like to bury a child. One of the first funerals I ever conducted as a young pastor had a casket that was very small. I'll never forget the tears running down the father's face. He said, "Pastor John, this is not supposed to be; parents aren't supposed to bury their children. Children are supposed to bury their parents."

So this was a very painful, painful picture. The mother was a widow and had no means of support. And then she lost her only son. It's interesting that we have the only Son of God, who raised the son of a widow, who was the only son.

So there are two crowds that meet, and there are two sorrowers who meet—the mother of this son, who is sorrowing the pain and loss of her child, and Jesus, the Man of sorrows. Isaiah 53:3 says about Jesus, "A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

The point I want to make is that we see the sorrow that sin has brought into the world. Be aware that theologically, Biblically and doctrinally, death has come into the world as a foreigner; death was not part of God's original design or plan. Sin brought death as a result of the Fall of man. Romans 5:12 says, "Just as through one man..." referring to Adam "...sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned..." Simply stated, Adam's Fall brought sin into the world, and sin brought death.

I was part of a panel at the church where I spoke this past week. The first question we were asked to answer was, "Why would God allow a child to get sick and die?" The only answer I could give was that we live in a fallen world, the world is subject to sin and sin brings death. Jesus Christ took on humanity and became incarnate, so that He could die for our sins, our sins could be forgiven, He rose from the dead and conquered the grave so that we could have eternal life. So the answer to sin and death is the Savior, Jesus Christ or the Gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 it says, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." Jesus came to save us from sin and death and to conquer and be victorious over the grave.

The second thing I want to point out, in verse 13, is the great compassion of our Lord. So great sorrow came into the world by sin and brought death, but then God came with great compassion in the Person of Jesus Christ. "When the Lord..." He didn't use "Jesus" or "He." He used the word "Curios," meaning "Lord of Life." "...saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.'"

The Lord's compassion is seen in three things in this verse. First, it was in His vision. It says, "When the Lord saw her...."

Do you ever feel like God doesn't see, God doesn't know, God doesn't understand and He's not aware of your circumstances? Sometimes when we're in the dark, we doubt His promises. We don't feel His presence. We don't have His peace. Never doubt in the dark what God has spoken in the light. So even though you may be in a difficult circumstance right now, He sees and He knows.

If you are trusting the Lord, simply knowing that He knows can bring you peace. "God, You see, You know; God, I'll trust You." We know that one of the compound names for God in the Old Testament is Jehovah-Jireh. We've interpreted that as "God provides." That's good, but the etymology of the word Jehovah-Jireh literally means "God sees." And whenever God sees, He provides. God's provision comes from His vision.

So whenever you're going through a difficult time, I want you to know that God sees and God knows. And if you know He's a God of compassion, you can rest knowing that He will work on your behalf. He won't be idle; He will be actively involved in your situation for your good and for His glory.

The second thing we see in the Lord's compassion is His heart. Verse 13 says, "He had compassion on her." He saw her and had compassion on her. All through the Gospels we read of Jesus doing miracles, because He was moved with compassion.

In the oriental mind, whenever you are feeling something, you are moved in your stomach and in your internal organs. This is why the Bible speaks of loving with all your bowels, your heart, your internal organs. Colossians 3:12 says, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies." So this word "compassion" actually has the idea of being effective in your gut or in your stomach or in your heart.

Jesus' eyes saw her, and His heart was moved. In John 11:33, when Jesus was at the grave of Lazarus and saw everyone weeping, it says, "He groaned in the spirit and was troubled."

I can't tell you how many times I've officiated at a funeral and been at the cemetery and looked into the faces of those who are grieving, and I see their tears. God supernaturally grants me compassion. And many times I've wept with those who were weeping, even though I didn't know the person who died and I didn't know the family. Just seeing the pain and realizing what sin has brought into this world makes me weep. But knowing that Jesus Christ has come to take care of our sin, to take care of death is a blessing.

So Jesus' heart was moved. The New English Bible translates that as "His heart went out to her." I like that. In Psalm 145:8, it says, "The Lord is gracious and full of compassion." That is Old Testament. Sometimes people say, "Well, isn't the God of the Old Testament very mean? And isn't the God of the New Testament very loving?" No; He's the same God. Even in the Old Testament, God is compassionate and longsuffering.

Notice, thirdly, that His compassion is seen in His words. "He...said to her, 'Do not weep.'" It's a command in the Greek. Think about how bizarre that is. She is a widow, she has one, young boy, who she loses, and she is crying. And Jesus says, "Do not weep." Why would He say that to this poor woman?! Because He is about to raise her son from the dead. He would take away the cause of her sorrow.

The Bible also tells us that when our loved ones die in Christ, we sorrow not "as others who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). It doesn't say that we don't sorrow; it says we don't

sorrow hopelessly. If we believe that Jesus died—and we do—and if we believe that Jesus was buried—and He was and we do—and Jesus rose from the dead—“even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus,” which is a metaphor for death in Jesus. They are with the Lord. And when we are “caught up...to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 17), then we will be reunited with them. What a blessed day that will be!

So Jesus tells her to stop weeping, and not because He is rebuking her or being mean to her; it's because He was going to raise her son from the dead. F.B. Meyer says, “He wipes away tears by removing the cause.” And one day when we get to heaven, “God will wipe away every tear from [their] eyes” (Revelation 21:4).

We see Jesus' sorrow that sin and death has brought, we see His great compassion and we see, thirdly, in verses 14-15, His great power that He demonstrated here on earth. “Then He came and touched the open coffin.” That is a reference to a slab of wood, which was like a cot. They would put the body on it. They didn't embalm so they didn't have caskets. The body would be wrapped in cloths with incense and spices. Then the body was buried either in a cave with a stone in front of it or in the ground with a pile of rocks on top, so no one would touch the grave.

In touching the slab of wood the body was on, Jesus would become ceremoniously unclean. That's interesting because He didn't care. He knew that God's purpose was mercy, not ceremony. He was going to raise the boy from the dead.

So Jesus stopped the funeral. D.L. Moody said that He went to the Bible to learn how to conduct a funeral. Every time Jesus did a funeral, He broke it up by raising dead people and couldn't find out what to do at a funeral.

Can you imagine?! You're on your way to the cemetery, and Jesus stops those who were carrying the boy's body. And then Jesus touched the slab of wood.

In verses 14-15, “He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ So he who was dead....” It says a second time that he was “dead.” “...sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.”

This miracle that Jesus performed was not in response to a prayer or to any indication of faith. When the Centurion wanted Jesus to heal his servant, Jesus said, “I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” (Luke 7:9). But this time when Jesus raised this boy from the dead, nobody's faith is mentioned and no prayer is mentioned.

It's interesting that the “faith preachers” don't use this text in their sermons, because there is no mention of faith. It was accomplished just by the compassion and power of Christ. So faith is not an issue here. It came about just from Christ's own compassionate heart.

So it was from His touch and from His command to the boy. Jesus said, “I say to you, arise.” Jesus was speaking to a corpse. The fact that He did that is because He has the power to

bring life. But the boy was really separated only from his body, and he still existed and could hear the Lord.

When someone dies, they don't cease to exist. There is life after death. We're not just a body; we have an eternal soul and spirit. And when you leave your body, the Bible says that you either go to be with the Lord, or you go to a place of judgment to be separated from the Lord for all eternity. Heaven or hell.

So Jesus speaks and the boy hears this command. We see the power of Jesus' words. Jesus is the Lord of life. When He raised Lazarus from the dead, He said, "Lazarus, come forth!" (John 11:43). He stood at the cemetery and named Lazarus. If He had said, "Come forth!" the whole cemetery would have emptied! As the Lord of life, Jesus has power over the grave.

Then notice the obedience, verse 15. "So he who was dead..." again it says "dead" "...sat up." Have you ever seen a dead person sit up? If you did, you would have died right then and there. And then to add to that, he "began to speak." How do we know? Because you have this big crowd, so everybody sees and hears it. But the Bible doesn't tell us what he said.

Every person in the Bible who died and came back never talked about what they saw. None of them wrote a book. I personally don't read books written by someone who died, went to heaven and wrote a book about it. That's dangerous. The Bible is the authoritative Word of God, not your subjective experience about what heaven is like.

What did this boy say? When I get to heaven, I'm going to find this boy and ask him what he said to Jesus and to his mother.

So he "sat up and began to speak." Have you ever heard the statement, "Dead men tell no tales"? Oh, yes they do; this boy could tell some tales! Then Jesus "presented him to his mother." I like this picture. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 says that those who have died in Christ, their bodies will be resurrected. "The dead in Christ will rise first." That's the resurrection of our bodies. When this happens, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up..." or "raptured" "...together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." So there is resurrection of the dead saints, rapture of the living saints and then reunion of all the saints.

I believe that when we get to heaven Jesus will be grabbing some people and grabbing others and putting them together. There is going to be a reunion. When you bury someone you love who has died in Christ, you will see them again. You will hug, embrace and He will wipe away the tears from your eyes. And you will spend eternity together.

I like the stanza in John Newton's song, Amazing Grace:

"When we've been there ten thousand years,

Bright shining as the sun,

We've no less days to sing God's praise

Than when we'd first begun."

No more death, no more sorrow, no more tears and no more crying. What a blessed thing that is. So there's resurrection, there's rapture and there's going to be a reunion. We will see our loved ones again.

Now, fourthly, in verses 16-17, we see the greatness of Jesus, greater than the prophets. This is the result of this miracle. "Then fear..." or "reverence" "...came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has risen up among us'; and, 'God has visited His people.' And this report about Him went throughout all Judea..." or "to the whole land of Israel" "...and all the surrounding region."

First, this fear gripped them all. One translation said, "Fear took hold of them." They must have been absolutely blown away by what they saw.

Then secondly, they began to glorify God. They didn't understand that Jesus is God; they're going to think that He is a great prophet. But they recognize that this is a miracle that only God could do, so they glorified God.

Thirdly, they said, "A great prophet has risen up among us." Why did they say that? In the Old Testament in 1 Kings 17, Elijah raised a boy, the only son of a widow. Elijah laid himself on the boy three times, prayed, God brought him back from the dead and he was given to his mother. So there are a lot of parallels between 1 Kings 17, Elijah's miracle, and that of Jesus in Luke 7. They felt that He came "in the spirit and power of Elijah," so they automatically concluded that He was a prophet.

Jesus is a prophet, but He's greater than the prophets. And He's much more than a prophet. He's the Son of God in human flesh. And what it takes to understand that is not seeing a miracle; it is the Spirit of God giving you revelation and illumination from the Word of God.

When Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" (Matthew 16:13-19), some said, "John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Then Jesus asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Then Peter answered, "You are the Christ..." or "Mashiach," "Messiah" "...the Son of the living God." Then Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven."

They didn't fully understand who Jesus was. When they said that they praised God, that there was a prophet among them and one greater than the prophets was there, that God had visited them, they didn't know who Jesus was. They just knew that God was doing a miracle. It would take a future revelation and understanding for them to come to the conclusion that Jesus Christ

was God.

And verse 17 of our text ends, “And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.” So Jesus was growing in popularity as He healed and did miracles.

I want to close with two thoughts. In this story we see, number one, that Jesus is awesome in His compassion. Our God is a God of compassion. He knows, He loves and He cares. I don’t know what you are going through today, but He is a Helper to the helpless.

Can you imagine how brokenhearted this woman was? But then she met Jesus. Jesus will help you in your hour of need. If you come to Him, if you turn to Him, He can help you with your greatest hurts. He is hope for the hurting.

Number two, we see that Jesus is awesome in His power. And “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). He has power to save, to forgive and to heal. And “God has visited His people” in the person of Jesus Christ.

There are a lot of prophets and a lot of religions, but there is only one God who became flesh, who gave His life on the Cross voluntarily, vicariously and victoriously for our sins. He rose from the dead and is seated at the right hand of God the Father. And Jesus Christ is coming back in glory, power and majesty. There is hope in Jesus.