

November 25, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Luke 7:11-17.

1. Contrast the life of a widow in first century Israel with that of a widow today.
2. How great was your spiritual need when Christ came to you?
3. Try to describe the compassion Christ felt for you when He touched you and gave you spiritual life.
4. Compare the fear the people in the crowd experienced with the fear we ought to experience in light of Christ's work in us.
5. How significant is "God with us" to you?

GOD WITH US
Luke 7:11-17

John began his account of the Good News by telling us that the eternal, living Word was not only with God from the beginning, but was God. Then John described a most astonishing situation. At least it is astonishing if we know anything about God. John wrote regarding the second member of the Godhead, the eternal Word, "*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him*" (John 1:10).

God the Son, the Creator, came into the world He created and the people He created didn't get it. They called Him Jesus. And most people assumed He was the son of the carpenter from the town of

Nazareth that was situated up in the back hills of Galilee. Sure, when He became a man, He astounded the crowds with His teaching, and He did some pretty remarkable things. But how could God become like us? That's the kind of thing mythology is made of, isn't it?

However, Jesus of Nazareth was God incarnate, the Son of God, fully equal with God, living on earth to bring the grace of God to people who desperately need it. The purpose of His teaching was to reveal the character of God to the fallen creatures. The purpose of His signs was to reveal the power and authority of God to the fallen creatures. While He was on earth, God the Son revealed, declared, demonstrated the person of God. That is what the writer to the Hebrew Christians meant when he opened his letter explaining that God the Son on earth was the exact manifestation of God the Father and by Him God has spoken to us. Are you listening? Have you heard? God your Creator longs for you to hear Him, listen to Him intentionally, and believe Him.

Sometimes, the fallen creatures got it, or more often than not, almost got it. Our text is one of the many examples of proof that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote in order to prove that Jesus of Nazareth was none other than "God with us." That is what the prophets promised. Isaiah declared, "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*" (Isaiah 7:14b). God inspired Matthew to affirm the fulfillment of that miracle. *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us) (Matthew 1:22-23).*

Through God's grace some people, especially those chosen to continue the ministry of Christ, fully grasped this truth. And so Peter declared, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16). And Thomas exclaimed upon seeing the risen Christ, "*My Lord and my God!*" (John 20:28). Even the masses that followed Jesus all over Palestine had to admit at times that He appeared to be the promised Messiah, God with us. That is what our text reveals. When Jesus demonstrated His authority over death, the crowds were impressed. They could not help but declare, "*God has visited his people!*" And most of them had no idea how important their

statement was. Nor were they aware of the extent to which their conclusion applied.

And many people still have knowledge about Jesus Christ. Some people actually like to talk about Jesus. But most people consider Him to be a good man, a prophet, a teacher, a doer of good stuff, or maybe even some kind of miracle worker. But “God with us”? No, that’s impossible. To conclude that Jesus is not God with us is to reject the only hope for forgiven sins, the only means for attaining reconciliation with our Creator and eternal life. Learn from Luke’s account the amazing reality that God is with us.

A Sad Circumstance (vv.11-13).

A man had died at a particular time in a particular place (vv.11-12). And so Jesus and the crowd went to a particular town for a particular reason. *Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him (v.11).* The time was soon after healing the servant of the centurion who had built the synagogue in Capernaum. Jesus left for Nain, a small town about 20 miles southwest of Capernaum and the crowd followed Him. While that might be a hard, full day’s journey alone, it probably took the crowd a couple of days to walk there.

Obviously, Jesus led the way because He was on a mission that He had to accomplish in Nain. Jesus always had purpose and direction as He fulfilled the work the Father sent Him to do in the time the Father sent Him to do it. He was always sensitive to time, place, and purpose. Jesus had said several weeks earlier as He began His ministry: *“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose” (Luke 4:43).* Jesus’s entire life was consumed with the mission of doing the work the Heavenly Father sent Him to do. He often declared that He was here doing the Father’s work.

Jesus told His critics, *“The testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me” (John 5:36).* He often told the disciples, His mother, the critics that His time had not yet come, or it was not His hour yet, or later on that the time had come to be delivered up.

Arriving near the end of the time the Father allotted for His ministry, Jesus told Pilate, *“You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37).* He was always on the mission to do the Father’s will. Therefore, Jesus intentionally left Capernaum for Nain at a particular time because He wanted to meet someone in Nain who was in need.

Arriving near the town of Nain, Jesus met a desperate situation. *As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her (v.12).* As Jesus arrived at Nain, a funeral procession was leaving the town at that very moment. That was because the Sovereign God is in control of the timing of all events for His glory. God arranges our circumstances the same way. How many times has God put us at precisely the right place at the right time to minister to someone and we were too distracted to see it?

Jesus arrived in time to witness people grieving the death of an only son. Death is always grievous. Death of a child is particularly grievous. Death of an only son was the epitome of grief in the ancient culture. The son was expected to care for his parents in their old age. Worse in this case was that the husband had already died. The son’s mother was a widow which made her especially vulnerable. The extreme of her vulnerability is described when Jesus pointed out that in her culture Pharisees stole widow’s homes (Mark 12:40). She had no social security. There were no assisted-living places where she could go. Who would care for the needy woman now that her only son had died?

The early church was famous for the compassion they showed to widows and orphans in this particular kind of need. Paul stipulated the characteristics of what constituted a “true widow” who needed the Church’s help (1 Timothy 5:3-5). That instruction revealed that a widow in need had no children or grandchildren who were responsible to care for her.

Such was the case of this poor widow in Israel. Though the Law of God commanded His people to care for a woman like this, the practice indicated that she would be victimized by the religious leaders. Where does such a needy person turn?

The words of our text paint a picture of extreme grief because of utter hopelessness. It is an accurate picture of the sinner who has come face to face with his or her sin. What a wonderful grief it is to see what God sees when He looks at us in our natural condition. If you have come to the point in your life where you realize that you are a spiritual beggar with no means at your disposal to pay for your sins, you know it is a good grief. To realize that you are so spiritually poor that you have no choice but to face the penalty for sin is a good conclusion. To realize that you are spiritually dead and must experience a life-giving miracle is the eternally critical circumstance in which to find yourself.

It is good for us to find ourselves in such critical circumstances because the Lord Jesus is near and the Lord has compassion (v.13). When Jesus saw the widow grieving at the loss of her son, her hope for security in life, He felt compassion (v.13a). Compassion means that Jesus's inner being, His heart was torn, overcome with emotion. He felt strong emotions toward this poor widow and the plight that had come upon her.

Jesus's compassion might be hard to understand when we remember that He is equal with the Father and it was the Sovereign God who allowed this situation to come about in the first place. Sometimes it is hard to weigh trials and difficult events with the fact that God is the God of love, the God of compassion, the God of all comfort. We forget that God is perfectly pure and just. Therefore, even His wrath and judgment flow from a heart that loves His creation.

But God's justice must allow the consequences or the working out of sin. That is why the Sovereign God allows the consequences of sin in an individual's life. That is why the Sovereign God allows the consequences of the sin principle in the world, the principle that has infected and marred the loving God's Creation. The universal sin principle is why the son died and why the mother was grieving. The universal sin principle is why Jesus has emotional upheaval in His heart for us the victims of sin.

Jesus commanded the woman not to respond normally. Seeing the woman grieving, Jesus *said to her, "Do not weep" (v.13b)*. Why would the compassionate, all-wise God the Son tell a woman who was grieving over the death of her son to stop weeping? It was not

that Jesus was calloused or uncaring. He is sympathetic with her grief. He was sympathetic because He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3).

He was sympathetic because *we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15)*. It wasn't that Jesus was telling the woman to quit showing her emotion. Rather, Jesus was telling the poor widow that it was no longer necessary for her to weep. Things were about to change. The blessed controller of all things was about to demonstrate who He actually was.

This is the compassionate Jesus who understands our weakness who comes to us and tells us to stop weeping about our sins. We are indeed as Solomon described his peers in his prayer, *And when they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) . . . (1 Kings 8:46)*. John reminded us that *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us (1 John 1:8)*. For some reason when we fail, we also fail to respond as John taught us: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)*.

Our adversary the devil loves to knock us down and keep us down. In the wake of sin, we are so easily overwhelmed by our failure that we see ourselves as useless and, like Elijah running from Jezebel (when he should have faced her down), pray for God to let us die, or like Jonah did when he failed to praise God for the "Ninevite" revival. Jesus comes to us in our original sin or in our failure in righteousness and tells us that it is no longer necessary to mourn over our sins and failures because in Him there is hope for restoration.

A Glorious Realization (vv.14-17).

The Lord revealed His divine authority by interrupting the process of a funeral (vv.14-15). *Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise" (v.14)*. Notice that Jesus didn't command the procession to stop their trek to the cemetery. He didn't tell them to quit mourning, because that's what friends and loved ones do at a funeral.

There were very possibly some professional mourners present and Jesus didn't tell them to quit (like He did when He raised Jairus's daughter).

However, what Jesus did would have been shocking in that culture. For a Jew to touch a coffin or a dead body would render him ceremonially unclean for a week and he would need to go through a ceremony to be purified (Numbers 19:11-22). If there were any Pharisees present, they would have been outraged and used this as proof that Jesus was no prophet sent from God. In fact, a procession like this on the way to the cemetery was a very solemn matter and to stop it would have been unacceptable.

Jesus didn't give anyone time to get angry. God the Son simply issued an authoritative command: "*Young man, I say to you, arise*" And no doubt someone present wondered, "And just who do YOU think you are?" It is not hard to imagine that some people felt like the religious leaders at the healing of the lame man who was let down through the roof. *And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:21)*. Who did this teacher from Nazareth think He was to command a dead man to get up? Maybe some people were skeptical like people today who think that Jesus of Nazareth was a good man and a good teacher, but that the miracles attributed to Him in the Bible are folklore. Because Jesus is actually God, when He commands the effects of sin to depart, something happens.

Jesus restored the dead man's life. *And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother (v.15)*. When Jesus the author of life speaks to dead people, they respond. He commanded Jairus's daughter, "*Child arise,*" and her spirit returned and she got up at once. *(Luke 8:54-55)*. He commanded His friend, "*Lazarus, come out.*" *The man who had died came out . . . (John 11:43-44)*.

And when Jesus the author of spiritual life rebukes the effect of sin in our lives, our spirit responds. *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages*

he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:4-7).

How has the change of salvation caused you to respond? How has the new life brought about by the miracle of salvation in you caused others to respond?

The people realized God was in their midst and they were gripped with fear (vv.16-17). *Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" (v.16)*. The phrase translated *fear seized them all* means that they were suddenly struck or held in the grip of fear. Humans would be afraid in such a situation because the experience was paranormal. They would be afraid of the power displayed by this "Man" from Nazareth.

God using a fellow human to raise the dead is a bit unusual. But did the people forget that God had used Elijah to raise the Gentile widow's son in Zerraphath? (In fact Jesus had just mentioned that event some days earlier, Luke 4:26). Just over the hill from Nain was the ancient town of Shunam. Many years earlier a kind family in that town provided the prophet Elisha an apartment to stay in when he visited. One day the young son of the family died, and God used Elisha to raise a young boy to life. (2 Kings 4:18-37). Had these people heard the story? Did they think it was legend or fairytale stuff?

Whether they had forgotten the stories from the past, or did not believe them, or had never heard them, they were suddenly brought up short. The people all concluded that this remarkable miracle proved one thing in two parts: "*A great prophet has arisen among us!*" "*God has visited his people!*" Moses had promised both of these realities. God told Moses, "*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him*" (Deuteronomy 18:18). And with the promise came the command to pay attention to what the Great Prophet taught. Moses said, "*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen*" (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Jesus Christ, the only Savior from sin, is the display of God's amazing grace to save us helpless sinners from sin's effect and penalty. He is God with us! No wonder the people spread the news.

And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country (v.17). It was wonderful that news about Jesus spread everywhere. But what was said and how did the people respond? It is good to tell about Jesus. It is good for us to talk about Jesus. But do we hear Him and obey Him? We hear Jesus speak through the Bible. We prove we trust what Jesus says when we obey Him.