

## **“The Power and Compassion of Christ”**

### **Luke 7:11-17**

In our text last week we saw the remarkable faith of the centurion and we noted particularly that he asked Jesus for a word, and believed that would be sufficient for his need. From our text this morning, the very next account in the book of Luke, we learn further about the power and compassion found in Jesus' words.

#### **I. The Need (v. 11-12)**

Jesus went to Nain. This was a small city about 12 miles southwest from Capernaum. This is the only time this city is mentioned in Scripture.

Now look at the scene that Luke describes for us at the beginning of verse 12, “Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.” As Jesus and the multitude with him came to the gate of the city to enter it, another group was having the city. This group is a funeral procession. A young man had died and they were carrying him out of the city for burial, as was the custom.

We are given a few important details about this scene. First, the man is dead. We are not told how he died. Whether it was from disease or accident, we don't know. We are not told his age, though Jesus does call him a “young man” in verse

14. But something happened and he died. This is not like the centurion's servant earlier in this chapter who was at the point of death. This man had already passed that point. He was being carried out of the city for burial. He was dead.

Next, we are told that he was an only son. He may have had sisters, we don't know, but he certainly didn't have any brothers. He was an only son.

The mother was a widow. Her husband and the father of this man had already died. We don't know how long it had been since his father died, but this woman's life had already been touched by grief. Her husband had already died. And now her only son had died, making her a destitute widow. Every man in that family and society structure who had a responsibility to care for her and provide for her had died. Now she was alone and destitute. She was a destitute widow.

Notice that the miracle in this text was witnessed by a large number of people. First we are told in verse 11, "Many of his disciples went with him, and much people." A large group of people had come with Jesus down from Capernaum. His disciples were there as well as just a general multitude, like the crowds described in chapter 6. And the end of verse 12 tells us that many "people of the city" were with this widow in the funeral procession.

And these two large groups meet near the gate of the city. In ancient Israel the city gates were often places of commerce and they could function as the courthouse as well, where important legal matters were handled. And so it is likely

that there were still more people present who just happened to be in this area, going about their regular business, when these two groups met.

This is important because an incredible miracle took place on this occasion. A man was raised from the dead. This is an incredible miracle, and certainly some would be skeptical when they heard about this. But this wasn't a miracle witnessed by only Jesus. Nor does this account rest on the testimony of the disciples. A great crowd of people were present and saw this miracle take place. And remember, Luke wrote this gospel account around A.D. 60, or about 30 years after this event took place. When Luke wrote this, there were people alive in Nain who witnessed this event and could attest to the truth of the account as it was written. The "young man" mentioned in this text may have still been alive when Luke originally wrote this. And Luke gave all the details someone would need in order to go check and see if these things were true. The miracle described in this text was witnessed by a crowd of people.

So far in our study of this text we have seen the need. A man had died. He had been the only son of his mother who was a widow. This put her in a precarious position. She needed help. She needed her son back. But how could that happen? She had an impossible need. Next we will look at the miracle found in this text. And in this miracle we see the power and compassion of Jesus.

## **II. The Miracle (v. 13-15)**

In verse 13 we see the compassion of Jesus Christ. Verse 13 begins, “And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her.” You can imagine this scene. As Jesus approached the city gates, he saw this other group of people coming toward Him. And he saw it was a funeral procession. He saw the dead man being carried out of the city. He saw the crowds who were following. But in particular, he saw this poor widow, and he had compassion on her.

How many needs did Jesus see every single day? Not only physical needs, but spiritual needs as well. He was truly man but He was also truly God and he could see what was in the hearts of men. Certainly everywhere Jesus looked he saw great needs. But when he saw this widow in her grief, he had particular compassion on her.

Why? Jesus was around other dead people. He didn’t always raise them from the dead. Jesus was around a lot of sick or hurt people that He did not heal. Jesus was constantly surrounded by people with spiritual needs and those needs were not always resolved, at least not from our perspective. I think of Judas Isacriot, or of the Pharisees, or the rich young ruler.

Out of all the people that were around Jesus on that day, what was it that stirred up His particular compassion for this widow? We don’t know. The only reason Scripture gives for this miracle is the compassion Jesus had when he saw this widow.

What a wonderful picture of the mercy and grace of God which comes upon men, free and undeserved. If you are a Christian, if you are resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ for salvation, maybe you have had this thought: “Why me? Why did God raise me from spiritual death to life?”

Nicodemus was wondering about spiritual birth in John 3, and in verse 8 Jesus said to him, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

How is it that two people can be exposed to the same amount of truth from the Word of God, can go to the same church, can even be raised in the same family, and yet one is saved and the other lost? How can this be? And the answer that Scripture gives is that God saves who He wills. Salvation can not be earned by the works of men. Nor can it be accomplished by the will of men. Salvation is earned by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Salvation is accomplished by Jesus Christ. He saves who he wills.

Just as he was moved with compassion and worked a life-giving miracle for this widow, so it was Christ’s compassion that brought salvation to you and I, fellow Christian. Isaiah 63:9 tells us that Jesus took upon Himself the work of our salvation and redemption in His love and pity. If you are in Christ, if you are a Christian, this is cause for wonder, and amazement, and it should move us to

worship God for the free and unmerited grace He has shown to sinners, myself chief among them.

But if you are not a Christian, what are you to do? How can you be saved if the grace of God truly is free and unmerited? If there is nothing you can do to earn the grace of God: no work, no prayer, no decision, no act of the will, nothing that can earn God's grace. What then can you do to be saved?

What did Jesus say? Mark 1:15, "[Jesus said], The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

Does your repentance earn salvation? No.

Does your belief earn salvation? No.

It's not about you and what you do, it is about Jesus and what He did. Come to Jesus is faith and repentance, and you will be saved. Again, listen to the words of Jesus in John 6:37, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

How can you be saved? Repent and believe the gospel.

How was your salvation accomplished? By the grace of God, given to you, free and unmerited. Again, verse 13 of our text says, "Jesus had compassion." Praise God for His compassion.

Jesus had compassion on this widow, and he said to her, "Weep not." There is nothing wrong with grief. We are told that Jesus wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus (John 11:35). But he said these words to this widow signifying the help He

was about to give her: He was about to raise her son from the dead. This was a particular reason for her particular case. But this principle can certainly be applied to all those who die in Christ.

All those who die in Christ are present with the Lord and their bodies will be raised again incorruptible in the resurrection. We are not to sorrow for them as those that have no hope (I Thessalonians 4:13). Take comfort in Christ's compassion, in His Word, in His promises, and "Weep not." Jesus said to the widow, "Weep not."

Verse 14 begins with these words: "And he came." He had compassion, and he came. Over and over again in the gospels we see that Jesus not only has the ability and will to help mankind, but he actually does help. Jesus saw this poor widow following the body of her dead son, her only son, as he was being carried to his grave, and He had the power to help her. Not only did He have the power, he also had the will to help her: "He had compassion on her." He had the power, He had the will, and He came. He drew near.

We cannot help but see in this a figure of Jesus' work as our Redeemer. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, and He alone had the power to redeem us. Not only did He have the power, He also had the will to help us: Again, Isaiah 63:9 tells us he was moved with love and pity. He had the power, He had the will, and He came.

Philippians 2:7-8 tells us Jesus: “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

The creator God entered His creation to accomplish our redemption. He came. And what a comfort it is to know that He came.

Now look at the words of Jesus in verse 14 of our text, “And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, **Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.**”

Was Jesus mad? Was he insane? What was Jesus doing, talking to a dead man?

Imagine if you were one of the disciples and you watched this scene unfold. Jesus saw a funeral procession. He stopped that funeral procession. He said to the widow and bereaved mother, “Weep not.” And then he said to the corpse “Arise.” What a scene this must have been.

The people in this funeral procession may not have known who Jesus was. We are given no indication that they recognized Jesus. No one asked Jesus to say or do anything. And yet here He was, and He said to this young man who was dead, “Arise.”

The people in this funeral procession must have been shocked. We would even understand if they felt upset. What was this man doing talking to a corpse?



Again, was Jesus mad? Was He insane? What was He doing, talking to a dead man?

Look at what happened in verse 15, “And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.” This is a wild claim from Luke. It’s fantastical, right? Certainly there were (and still are) some readers of this gospel account, who, like the men of Athens in Acts 17:31, mocked “when they heard of the resurrection of the dead.” Yet we are told that this is what happened. And remember, this is a well-attested to miracle. A large number of people were present and witnessed this miracle take place. In Luke’s time, if someone wanted to, they could have gone to Nain and verified Luke’s account as many of these witnesses would have still been alive. This is a remarkable miracle which demonstrates Jesus power, even over death itself.

There was no madness in Christ’s command because he possessed the power to make this dead man hear and obey this command. With the word from Jesus: “Arise,” went also the power of life. This man who had been dead, who just moments before had no power of his own, now he rose at Christ’s word.

And again, in this account we see a picture of our own salvation. We were spiritually dead. We had no power of our own to rise to God. Yet the gospel call goes out to all men everywhere to repent and believe. It’s madness. We are dead. What good is this command to repent and believe? We have no power to obey.

Yet all over the world every day dead men are raised by the Word of God. Romans 10:17, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Salvation is a miracle of God’s grace. Dead men are raised to life by the Word of God.

Now look at what this young man did: “He . . . sat up, and began to speak.” He gave immediate evidence of being alive. Where there is life, there will be evidence of that life. And this is true of both physical and spiritual life.

Imagine if this account told us that Jesus raised this man from the dead, but he lay there on the bier and they carried him off and buried him. That’s laughable. That’s no resurrection. Where there is resurrection, there will be life, evidence of life.

And yet sometimes in spiritual matters we are willing to rest on a bare profession. We claim spiritual life or pronounce spiritual life where there is no evidence of being alive. You cannot be born again by the Spirit, you cannot become a new creature in Christ, and then go on being carried to your grave by your sins and your lusts, all the while appearing just as spiritually dead as you have always been. Salvation in Jesus Christ is transformative. It is life-giving. And where there is life, there will be evidence of life.

Now look at what Jesus did with this young man. The end of verse 15 says, “[Jesus] delivered him to his mother.” This was a miracle of mercy. Jesus was

moved with compassion for this poor woman. He raised this young man from the dead and gave him back to his mother.

And that is where the record of this miracle ends. We are not told if Jesus said anything further to this young man or his mother. We are not told if they said anything to Jesus. We are simply told that Jesus had compassion on this widow, and with the power of God over even death itself, Jesus told this young man “Arise,” and he arose. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. This miracle is an incredible example of Jesus power and His compassion.

The account of the miracle itself in this text is finished, but as you can imagine, this caused quite the stir. The last two verse of our text tell us about the response of the people to this miracle.

### **III. The Response (v. 16-17)**

First, we are told at the beginning of verse 16, “There came a fear on all.” This “fear” is the Greek word “phobos.” It is a strong word for fear. It is the same word Luke used to describe the fear of Zacharias and the shepherds when angels appeared to them. This is terror. The people were terrified. And we certainly understand that response.

Imagine if you were at a funeral and the dead man sat up and began to talk. And he did so at the command of another man who had walked up to the coffin and

said, “Arise.” This was a surprising scene, a shocking scene, and the people were afraid. But notice that this was a godly fear.

Verse 16 goes on and tells us that they “glorified God.” The Lord should be feared for his goodness as well as his greatness. They had witnessed a miracle and they gave honor where it was due: “They glorified God.” A very appropriate response. Now look at what they said.

Verse 16 tells us they said, “That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.” First, they called Jesus a “great prophet.” Why did the people immediately make this connection between resurrection and a great prophet? In the Old Testament we have three specific accounts of resurrection. All three accounts are found in or related to the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. Elijah prayed for the widow’s son and he was raised from the dead in I Kings 17. In II Kings 4, Elisha prayed for the son of the woman of Shunem and he was raised from the dead. And then finally in II Kings 13 we have the unusual account of a man’s body that was thrown into Elisha’s tomb, and when he touched Elisha’s bones, he was resurrected.

Elijah and Elisha were two great prophets who raised people from the dead. Now Jesus has raised someone from the dead. And so the people immediately identify this as the work of a great prophet. Possibly the great prophet prophesied of in Deuteronomy 18. They called Jesus a “great prophet.”

And then they said, “God hath visited his people.” They did not realize the truth of their own words. God had not merely visited them in an impersonal way through the power to work this miracle. God had not visited them in a figurative way, remembering His people and sending them a prophet in their time of need and distress. God had visited His people, personally. He was standing there, in the flesh.

Remember the prophetic words of Zacharias in Luke 1:68-69, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.”

This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. God had visited his people. He came for their redemption, to accomplish their salvation. He did not come impersonally, or figuratively. He came in the flesh and “visited his people.”

Now notice what v. 17 says, “And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judæa, and throughout all the region round about.” The people talked about this miracle. News of this miracle spread. This word “rumor” has no nefarious connotation to it. It is just the word “log’os.” Often translated elsewhere as “word” or “report.”

This miracle took place up in Galilee, but word of Jesus and this miracle of raising the dead spread throughout Judea, and the surrounding regions. And we are told that the Jews came in mass and bent the knee before Jesus, the Messiah. No. In fact, we are not told of anyone who received Jesus as Messiah as a result of this

miracle. Even John the Baptist (who was in prison at this time), when he heard of this miracle, sent this message to Jesus, “Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?” (Luke 7:19) Nearly everyone in that region heard about Jesus, yet few believed on Him.

It is no different in our time. Many people hear the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, yet they do not commit themselves to Him. They hear the gospel, but there is no faith. There is no repentance. They go on in their sin, unchanged.

Maybe you are here this morning and this describes you. You have heard the gospel, but you didn't receive it. You may have been deeply affected at some point in the past, you have had a religious experience, maybe even been convicted of your sin, and yet you have gone on, unchanged. Like the multitude described in this text, you may have experienced the fear of God. Even a godly fear, a fear that inclines you to glorify God. And yet you know that you are not saved. You have never been born again. You can hear the gospel, and even tell the gospel to others, and yet still not receive Jesus Christ.

What must you do to be saved? “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” (Acts 16:31) Don't be satisfied with hearing rumors about Jesus. Don't merely observe Him from a distance. Believe on Him, Trust in Him, put your faith in Him. Hebrews 11:6 says, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of

them that diligently seek him.” "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.” (Isaiah 55:6)

As believers, when we look at this text, we should be struck with the power and compassion of Jesus Christ revealed here. Who is man that God is mindful of him? Yet this text reminds us of the compassion of Christ. Praise God for his compassion.

Who can deliver man from his sin? We need someone who has power over sin and death. Only God has such power. And at the word of God, men are raised to life. Praise God for his power.