

Jesus Changes Everything for a Mourning Woman

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[0 : 00] Welcome to another time of worship here in Beclough. I'm James Ross, the minister here. We're about to begin six weeks in Luke's Gospel, thinking about the great truth that Jesus changes everything. We're going to see it as he encounters different women in Luke's Gospel. And to help us to think about that, I want to begin with some words from Luke chapter 7, which is where we'll be. At verse 20, we read, When the men came to Jesus, they said, John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else? At that very time, Jesus cured many who had diseases, illnesses and evil spirits and gave sight to many who were blind.

So he replied to the messengers, go back and report to John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. I'm going to think about how good the good news is in just a few moments. But before we do that, let's pray together briefly. Our Father, thank you for another opportunity that we have to open your words together to think about the person work of your son, the Lord Jesus. And we thank you for all that we discover of his character, of his power, of his love in the Gospels, that as he announces good news to the poor, as he brings hope, as he brings life. Lord, may you help us to be drawn closer to Jesus, so that we would worship him, that we would trust him, that we would have a sense of his ongoing power and work, his desire to work his good in us and for us, his desire to continue to build his kingdom, to continue to give hope. And I pray that as we spend these weeks together in Luke's Gospel, you would cause us again to see how powerful and glorious our God and Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ truly is. Lord, as we come to read your word and then to reflect on it, may you work its truth deep into our hearts. May you change us by your grace. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So we're going to read the first 17 verses of Luke chapter 7, and we're going to focus on the second story that we'll be reading, where Jesus raises a widow's son. So let's hear God's word together. When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was ill and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.

[3 : 35] So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him, Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.

But say the word and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me. I tell this one, go, and he goes, and that one, come, and he comes. I say to my servant, do this, and he does it.

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, I tell you, I have not found such great faith, even in Israel. Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

Soon afterwards, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.

And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her, and he said, don't cry. Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearer stood still.

[4 : 47] 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. They were all filled with awe and praised God.

A great prophet has appeared among us, they said. God has come to help his people. This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

Jesus changes everything. That's our theme for the next six weeks. And by way of introducing our new series, let me just explain why we're going to be thinking about this topic.

It really came initially from an article I read by Rebecca McLaughlin, who wrote the excellent book *Confronting Christianity*. She had an article titled, *Jesus Changed Everything for Women*.

And one phrase really stood out for me. She said, if we could read the Gospels through first century eyes, Jesus' treatment of women would knock us to our knees.

[5 : 53] Jesus repeatedly welcomed women, his contemporaries despised. And I thought that's so helpful for our cultural moment. You know, we live in the Me Too movement, where we remember, and the nation remembered, sort of the tragedy that happened to Sarah Everard.

There is a real need for us, always to recognise the honour that Jesus gave to women, and that we as God's people, we as the church ought to then do.

But then as I began sort of reading these encounters between Jesus and a variety of women in the Gospels, I was led to sort of think, what if we really, as Christians, what if we really believed this was still true?

You know, more than, yes, I believe Jesus healed and honoured and transformed and gave life then. But what if I really believed that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever, and that he still has that same mercy and power and love and forgiveness for me and for you, for my family, for my friends, for my community, for my city, for our world.

What difference would that make? What difference would it make to our prayers? What difference would it make to our witness if we really believed that Jesus still is powerful and loving and kind?

[7 : 26] And so my hope is we have these six weeks where we think about the reality that Jesus changes everything, that it would stir up faith in us, stir up hope and joy and worship.

And so we begin, and we begin with a mourning woman whose life was utterly transformed. We're going to work our way through this text and we're going to see four different scenes together.

The first scene is found in verses 11 and 12, where we see two crowds. Luke, as it were, has his wide angle lens on and he sees two very different crowds who are moving in opposite directions, but moving towards each other.

And now let me just place this text in the wider unit that it's a part of. So from the beginning of chapter 7 to verse 21 of chapter 8, the theme there, the focus is on good news.

So we read that in chapter 7, verse 22. Jesus said the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

Chapter 8, verse 1. After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.

[8 : 39] So the question is, how good is this good news? And our answer today is that the kingdom of God brings life in the place of death. Truly it is good news.

So we see two crowds, as we were saying. Verse 11. Soon afterwards, Jesus went to a town called Nain and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him.

So for this crowd, I want us in our imagination, perhaps to think of the Six Nations rugby crowd. So imagine the Scottish fans spilling out of Murrayfield after a big win.

The joy and the excitement. Think of a football team after a cup final victory. So there's joy, there's excitement. So here's the disciples, here's a large crowd and Jesus is at the head. And we're told that it's after this.

So we need to think what has just happened. Jesus has been teaching on the kingdom of God. And also, chapter 6, verse 19, we read, So this crowd are full of excitement and full of expectation.

[9 : 44] There are some in this crowd whose lives have been utterly transformed by encountering the power of Jesus. His friends are there, his followers are there, those who are trusting in him and who are eager to see more of what God in the flesh, Jesus the king, will do.

They are led by the king of life. So there's one crowd. But there's a second crowd. And our focus switches from life to death.

Verse 12. As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out, the only son of his mother. And she was a widow and a large crowd from the town was with her.

So perhaps it would be helpful for us here to think of a funeral procession that you have seen or that you have been part of. You imagine the mourners being led by a hearse.

Mourners lining the way to a grave. A coffin being carried to be placed in the ground. Here a crowd has come to mourn, to show support for this mother.

[10:52] And at the head of this crowd is the young man being carried who has died. Two crowds come together. Spurgeon, the great preacher from a previous generation, he picks up on this rich symbolism.

And he imagines, helps us to imagine two kingdoms represented here, lining up in battle, as it were. Here is Jesus representing life. And here is this coffin representing death.

And the good news, how good is the good news? The good news is that Jesus is stronger than death. And we'll see that there is really no context when the author of life comes to confront the force of death.

Martin Luther, the reformer, he gave sage advice, wise advice. He said every time we hear of death, every time we see a coffin, every time we attend a funeral, we should think of death. We should think of our own mortality in those moments. And he said we should also think of the cause, to trace it back all the way to the beginning, to recognise that it's sin that leads to death.

[12:07] Sin and death are great enemies. But we should also, as Christians, we should also think of the gospel. We should think of Jesus, who is the resurrection and the life.

He is the king who brings eternal life. He is the king who has come to defeat sin and death. So that as Christians, we would both hold on to that hope for ourselves as we encounter death and suffering.

But we would also hold out that hope to others, to those who have yet have not come to discover Jesus' resurrection hope for themselves.

So we move then, Luke moves us from these two crowds and he zooms in to draw attention to a mourning mother.

And at the same time, to take our focus on the compassion of Jesus. I read this week a photo essay from Time magazine, which was called Below the Line Portraits of American Poverty.

[13:21] And so this photo essay by a Danish photojournalist featured a wide variety of people. There were migrant farmers. There were hurricane victims. There were Native American communities.

There were military veterans. There were people in the same way that they were in many cases. The pain, the sadness, the despair etched on people's faces.

Poverty is a reality that has many human faces. And here in our gospel, Luke is drawing a particular portrait of poverty for us.

As he draws our attention to this woman. Here is someone who is without a protector.

She is a widow. She has no husband and now she has lost her son. She has no provider. She is now vulnerable and will struggle to survive.

[14:23] She has no family and no family line. She will be suffering from a depth of loneliness and sorrow. One of the weakest in society.

Full of misery. And it's to this woman that Jesus comes. Chris Wright, who has written a lot of books on Old Testament law and ethics.

He speaks of the warm heart of Old Testament laws. And we maybe don't think about it in that way. But there are so many of the laws of the Bible that are geared towards providing for the poor and the vulnerable and the least of these in Old Testament society.

And those principles to be carried forward by the church. Well, here, Jesus, the lawgiver, presents his warm heart. This is the warm heart of compassion of Jesus that we see.

Not only does Luke focus shift to the woman, so too does the focus of Jesus. Verse 13. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said to her, don't cry.

[15:44] Jesus' heart went out to the woman. If we feel a measure of pain and sadness when we consider a story like this or when we look at photo essays, when we see the hurt and the misery of the people around us, I don't know how much more is that true of Jesus?

Jesus, who is the perfect human as well as being perfectly God. His compassion goes out and moves towards this woman.

When we think about ourselves, I imagine we recognise that our compassion comes with limits. There's always that temptation for us to keep our distance.

Always that question, I just don't know what to say. And so we take a step back. Sometimes we're so full of our own problems that we just don't have capacity for the problems of someone else.

We're afraid of feeling awkward or saying the wrong thing. And so we move away rather than moving towards. By contrast, as Joni Erikson says, Jesus fully and selflessly enters into someone else's suffering.

[17:01] What a wonderful saviour we have. And what about his commands as he says to the mourning mother, don't cry. Wouldn't this be such a cruel and heartless thing to say to someone if we were to walk up to someone in the depths of pain and say, stop crying.

So cruel unless he is going to follow it with action. Turning tears to joyful reunion. Which of course is what he will do.

Now as we consider the compassion of Jesus entering into this woman's story, here's my question. What if we today really believed that this was still true?

That Jesus has more mercy and compassion than we could ever think to ask him for? Imagine the difference it would make for our prayers, for ourselves and for others.

To know that here is a God who enters in. Here is Jesus who can extend sympathy.

[18:13] That we could sing and believe what a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. That your pain, your tears, your loneliness, your fears.

He sees them. He cares for you in them. So that we would trust him. And receive his compassion and comfort.

And that we would pray that that would also be true for others. How would it change the way that we live? Jesus is our saviour.

He's also our model, isn't he? So what would it mean to be like Jesus? It would mean that we would see and be drawn towards those who suffer.

That we would make room. We would make time. We would give energy. Longing to bring God's comfort and God's hope. By being present. By praying.

[19:16] By bringing God's word. And God's comfort. And think about the difference it would make for our mission as well. Because here is a reminder that Jesus' compassion and grace are powerful.

That he can bring lasting change. He transforms lives. He can bring hope. He does bring restoration. There is no darkness so deep that Jesus cannot find a person and rescue.

And cause his light to shine where there is darkness. How good is our good news? Well if only we could ask this mother after meeting Jesus.

We would be reminded in her praise and her wonder. That Jesus gives her a good news of life beyond death. Of hope beyond despair.

Scene three in our short story takes us to focus on the young man.

[20:25] And the resurrection power of Jesus. Now it's interesting to notice commentators make the point that verse 13 is the first time. In Luke's gospel that Jesus is called the Lord.

When the Lord saw her. And that makes sense in life what's about to come. Here is Jesus showing that he's Lord even over death itself. That great enemy. That one that causes such fear in our hearts.

And here in verses 14 and 15 we have this incredible miracle don't we? A signpost to Jesus' resurrection power.

Here is the great test and the great evidence of his being Lord. Of his being good. Has he got power even over death itself?

Can he bring? Is he the resurrection and the life? Well let's look at our text. Verse 14. Jesus went up and touched the beer or the coffin they were carrying the man on.

[21:32] And the bearers stood still. So the procession would be carrying an open coffin as was the custom. And so when Jesus touched the beer that the man is on there is a sense of shock.

So they stop in the first time. It's like this is new. What do we do? But here's the shock. Jesus by touching the dead body should be unclean.

Ritually, religiously. But instead the greater power of Jesus means he will remove that uncleanness. He will give life in the place of death.

And then as if they weren't surprised enough by the touch that is the second command of Jesus. Young man I say to you get up. Here is the creator and the sustainer of life.

The one who breathed life into Adam. Now restoring breath and life to this young man. He sits up and he is alive again.

[22:39] Sometimes we're so familiar with the gospels that we lose a sense of this wonder. Of this power. Of this life giving power of Jesus. The dead man sat up and began to talk.

The dead man sat up and began to talk. And why did Jesus do it? Notice at the end of verse 15 Jesus gave him back to his mother. Jesus uses his power not to serve himself but to humbly serve this desperately sad lady that he met on the road.

Isn't Jesus a perfect king? He's not self-serving. He's not power hungry. He's not indifferent to our needs. And remember that Jesus in heaven, his heart is unchanged.

He's not selfish. This little scene helps us I think in two different ways. Helps us as we look ahead to the rest of the gospel story.

It anticipates the crucial events in the gospel. Because remember Jesus who enters in. At the cross, Jesus won't just touch death at a distance.

[23 : 45] He will in his own body take death. As our substitute and as our sacrifice for us and for our sin.

Taking the wages of sin, the penalty due to sin, which is death, which is separation. He will do that for us. Death cannot contain death.

And then three days later he will take up his life again. Death cannot contain. Death cannot defeat Jesus. So here is a little signpost to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

And in that there is hope of eternal life for us all as we look to Jesus in faith. And so it anticipates those gospel events. But it also points to gospel hope.

Because this Jesus who called to the dead man here is still calling today. His voice is still being heard to the ends of the earth. He is still calling to those who are spiritually dead.

[24 : 47] To those who are lost in the misery of sin and despair. And he is calling to bring new life. As king he is commanding people. To hear and to respond in faith.

And to give by his grace resurrection power. Have you heard his voice? Have you responded to his call with faith?

With gratefully receiving this wonderful announcement that in Jesus there is life? Do you believe this?

Do I believe this? So I hope that what Jesus did then, what Jesus has done for me, Jesus can do for others. Do you remember that every testimony, every person who is a Christian has a testimony to the miracle of resurrection power?

Of Jesus working in us, of bringing life where there was death, of bringing light where there was darkness. And if he has saved you, he is also strong to save others.

[26 : 02] So pray with faith. So pray with faith. Love with purpose. Speak with hope. Knowing that Jesus changes everything.

Not that we can raise the dead spiritually. But we are trusting in the Jesus who can. And that we are trusting in the Jesus.

Let's do it. Let's do it. Let's do it. Let's do it. takes us back again to the crowds and to the worship of Jesus. I wonder if you were surprised, perhaps glad in a sense, that with the news of the passing of Prince Philip, the TV broadcasters and global leaders and sporting schedules all sought to pay their respects.

It seems a fitting response to show honour to this public figure who'd been central to the royal family.

Well that being the case, how much more then should Jesus receive honour and worship in light of his kingdom, his compassion, his power, his love. And so what Luke does now is he zooms back out to focus again on the crowds and what's their response. Well this is where we can see two different attitudes and two different expressions, responses that we can learn from. First in verse 16, they were all filled with awe. There's a sense of honour, a sense of wonder. They're in the presence of a greatness, recognising no one else could do this. No other figure comes close to Jesus. No one else is strong and mighty to save and to raise the dead. And so awe is natural. And they praised God. And again, think about it, in light of the personal work of Jesus, what else would we do? What else should we do?

[28 : 17] He has the power to give life. Here is a love that stoops to help. Here is a compassion that enters in. Here is a resurrection power that promises eternal life. Worship makes sense.

Worship actually is what we were made for. We were made to know and enjoy and glorify our God. And as we read the Bible, as we read the gospels, we're never short of reasons for doing that. And look at what they say, these crowds.

And what they say speaks more than they ever intended, I think. Verse 16, a great prophet has appeared among us. Probably thinking back to Elijah and Elisha and their miraculous powers given by God.

But here is one who is greater than Elijah and Elisha. He has power in himself to raise the dead. He is one who, when he speaks, he speaks for God. Yes, but he speaks as God. And he brings life-giving truth with a unique power beyond any of the prophets before. And then they said, God has come to help his people.

Yes, he has. Because here is Jesus, God in the flesh, Emmanuel, God with us. And he has come to help. He has come to rescue and save. And this resurrection is a glimpse into that greater work of Jesus. In his death and resurrection, he can work resurrection life in our hearts and lives, giving us hope, not just now, but for all eternity.

And so as we have considered this Jesus, this Jesus who changes everything for this, a woman, for this family, will we join our voices with that of the crowds to worship our great king. Jesus changes everything for this woman.

[30 : 06] What will we take away from this today? What will our response be? What change will Jesus make for us? Perhaps it will be an increased sense of wonder, as we have seen again the heart of Jesus and the power of Jesus.

As we've seen his transforming work and as we've come to know that he is still the same. And that that wonder would then send us out into a new week, ready to live with hope and with joy, with expectation.

So maybe wonder and praise will be our response, but maybe hope and faith is going to be our response, that we'd be so encouraged as Christians to lean on this Jesus, the one who is the resurrection and the life, to have faith in his mercy. As we see perhaps people in our circle who have desperate needs, who have pain and sadness, that we would both pray and act in his name, fully confident that he is not sitting back indifferent. Jesus is not like the Buddha who sort of would say to us, don't feel too much, who stands sort of impassive. Jesus has entered in and Jesus fully feels and fully sympathises and is able to bring compassion and comfort and hope.

And so we pray and act in his name with faith. Perhaps the response will be trust, maybe fresh trust or maybe for the first time we'll put our trust in Jesus as Saviour, that you'll hear the call of your Creator, your Saviour, your King, that as you have seen that he has entered into our world in order to show love, that you would ask him by his grace to give you that new life because you've come to see that Jesus has the power to change everything.

Let's pray. Lord our God, we thank you that in this short story we see so much of the good news.

[32 : 24] We see that Jesus has come to set up his kingdom and it's a kingdom and that speaks life, that brings life, that we have seen that Jesus is full of compassion.

He doesn't stand with his arms folded at a distance, but he has come and he's entered in and he is still strong and mighty to save and to help and to heal and to restore.

We thank you that we have seen the power of Jesus and we pray to know that power in our life and in our family and among our friends and with our colleagues and our community because the world needs the resurrection power of Jesus.

Lord we pray that you would make us worshippers today and this week as we consider, as we ponder as to how good Jesus is.

We pray in his name. Amen. To close our time, we'll sing. First of all, my worth is not in what I own.

[33 : 27] And then we'll sing a section of Psalm 139. My worth is not in what I own.

Not in the strength of flesh and bone. But in the costly wounds of love.

At the cross. My worth is not in skill or name.

In weight or losing pride or shame. But in the blood of Christ that flowed at the cross.

I rejoice in my Redeemer. The greatest treasure.

[34 : 39] Wellspring of my soul. I will trust in him. I will trust in him. No other. My soul is satisfied in him alone.

As summer's flowers we fade and die. Fame, youth and beauty hurry by.

But life eternal calls to us. At the cross.

I will not boast in wealth or might. Or human wisdom's fleeting light.

But I will boast in knowing Christ at the cross. At the cross. I rejoice in my Redeemer.

[35 : 48] Rejoice in my Redeemer. Greatest treasure. Wellspring of my soul. I will trust in him no other.

My soul is satisfied in him alone. To wonder see that I confess.

My worth and my unworthiness. My value fixed. My value fixed. My rights are paid.

At the cross. I rejoice in my Redeemer. Greatest treasure. Wellspring of my soul. I will trust in him no other.

My soul is satisfied in him alone. I will trust in him no other.

[36 : 54] My soul is satisfied in him alone. I will trust in him no other. PROFESSION DEPUTY.

I will trust in him no other. Now ■■■estion doens Compantle. I obey and I will trust in him no other.

However, my self is satisfied in him alone. He will trust in him no other. Whatever, nor in yourself.

And also traditional ejemplo. I will trust in him no other.

For you created me And gave me life Within my mother's womb You fashioned me I'm fearfully And wonderfully made I praise you

As your mighty works I see My frame could not be Hidden from your sight When I was made Within a secret place When I was woven In the depths of earth My unformed body Was before your face

Your eyes beheld me

[39 : 43] In my unborn state And all the days That you ordained for me Were written in the book

That you had made Before a single day Had come to be How precious are your thoughts To me, O

God There some is vast And far beyond my view

To count them is like Counting rains of sand When I awake from sleep I'm still with you For nowush Taran