

Luke 7:11–17

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Date: 01 June 2025

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[0 : 0 0] The sermon passage this morning is found in Luke chapter 7, verses 11-17. To find this on page 956 in the white Bibles that we provide.

! If you are able, would you please stand for the reading of God's word. Luke chapter 7, verses 11-17.

Soon afterward, he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. 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 did a considerable crowd from the town was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her, Do not weep. Then he came up and touched a bier, and the bearers stood still.

And he said, Young man, I say to you, arise. And the dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, A great prophet has arisen among us, and God had visited his people.

[1 : 1 8] And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. This is God's word. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Well, good morning. Let me add my greetings to those who have already greeted you. If you're visiting a loved one, helping them move out for the summer, thanks for choosing to spend the morning with us.

Let me pray, and then we will enter in. Father, your word is living. It is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.

And so this morning, our prayer is that we would feel its life, that it would impart life, that it would divide our hearts, that we would be able to discern what is true and what is false.

Help us to listen while we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, this morning, we continue our series titled, Jesus Changes Lives.

[2 : 3 4] There are six snapshots from the Gospel of Luke, presenting to us individuals who are forever changed when they encountered Jesus.

Last week, Jesus approached Levi, one of the upper echelon, one of who occupied kind of the higher level of the socioeconomic scale, and we watched him leave a lucrative occupation, the lucrative occupation of tax collecting, to follow Jesus.

He had much, but his heart had a great need. And this morning, well, last week, it culminated with a celebration, a jubilant party, a festive feast.

Well, this morning, we moved from a feast to a funeral. In contrast to watching Jesus interact with the upper echelon, we find ourselves looking at Jesus, interacting with one who was destitute, despairing, and devoid.

How does Jesus, how can Jesus, change the life of someone who's lost everything, possesses nothing, and is emptied of all hope?

[4 : 02] How can Jesus change your life, change my life, when our grief is great? My desire is to make clear this single truth to you, that Christ's compassion meets us when our grief is the greatest.

Christ's compassion meets you when your grief is the greatest. The text will unfold chronologically. We'll see a great grief.

It's followed by God's great compassion and will conclude with the gospel's great expansion.

A great grief, God's great compassion, the gospel's great expansion. Our great grief, verses 11 and 12.

Now the picture is vivid. Imagine it with me. Luke has told us, a great crowd is following Jesus. In verse 11.

[5 : 10] Some have traveled, likely with him, from Capernaum, a full day's walk away, where the previous miracle had taken place. They're coming into the main gate of a town called Nain.

Now it's a significant town. It's a city. It has a gate. It's walled. As the great crowd behind Jesus drew near the town, Luke tells us they are met by an equally significant crowd.

As the crowd with Jesus is entering into Nain, there is another crowd exiting the gate. They accompanied an unnamed woman, a woman who was accompanying her lifeless son, her only son.

Verse 12 is a verse of incredible tragedy. In a single sentence, we are told of this woman's destitution. She was en route to bury her son, her only son.

An only child is especially a loved child. We are not told his age, but we know he is a young man from verse 14. And sadly, this is not the first procession, family procession, in which she has taken part.

[6 : 40] We find in the same sentence, she's a widow, having previously already buried her husband. She has been stripped of the two most significant earthly relationships in life.

And it's not hard to see why there is a significant crowd accompanying her on this very bitter day. The whole town would feel the sympathy towards her pitiable condition.

Her grief was great. She had lost both her means of protection and provision. Death had robbed her of the safety that came from marital status.

Death now robs her of the prospects of provision and inheritance. No protection, no provision. It puts her in a destitute place. Having lost provision and protection, I doubt either would hurt as much as the eerie quietness of an empty home.

The loneliness that is brought through the hollowness of the heart, abandoned by her dearest relationships. She was now alone in the world.

[7 : 58] Few in this room would know such a grief. Only a handful know this persistent pain.

Only a small number would know agony this enduring. I went through our membership list, and the best I know, I'm aware of only one widow in this congregation.

The same list yields few who have lost children. And here we see the grave causes our greatest grief.

It is a merciless thief. It is a ruthless robber. I am convinced that the greatest grief that I will ever experience will be when the life of those who I love the most expire.

The thought of having to bury a loved one is enough to incapacitate me. Grief is the heaviest of our emotions.

- [9 : 05] It flows out of human suffering. It cripples us. It crumbles our faith. C.S. Lewis, the well-known British author, writes, he tries to take pen to paper to record his thoughts, to convey the extent of it, the pain of death as his wife passed in a book, *A Grief Observed*. He writes vividly what it feels like to go to God in this pain. He describes going to God only to receive a door that is shut, hearing the latches latch from the inside, and then silence. With the shut door and having silence, Lewis notes something astounding. He writes, one may think that the danger is the abandonment of faith and belief in God altogether. No. He writes, the real danger is coming to believe dreadful things about him. The conclusion, Lewis writes, I dread is not that so God's not there after all. No. No. But, oh, this is what God's really like. You see, grief may lead to unbelief, but Lewis says the greater danger is actually believing that God is dreadful, that he's desiring our demise, plotting our end in the most painful way possible.
- [10 : 46] He's on to something. unbelief may result in grief, and certainly that's led to all sorts of atheistic ideas. But the greater danger is this, that believing God is actually our enemy. Believing that he is the devil himself, he's in all of our sorrow, misery, and grief. And this is the accusation of the world, is it not? The God of the Bible, he's not omnipotent. Oh, okay, fine, I'll concede he's omnipotent. He's all-powerful, almighty, all-sovereign, all-reigning. But in his omnipotence, he's dreadful because he's unable to relieve any human suffering and resolve our grief. Our grief is so great. Therefore, they conclude, your God is so cruel. It's no longer, I don't believe in God, they say. It's I believe in God, but he's just a cruel monster. And perhaps, that's what one may conclude. And perhaps, that's what you feel.
- [12 : 06] whatever pain, grief, sorrow, agony, you're experiencing, or one day will experience, that I am no fool, that I know I will have to bury my mom and dad unless I go first. One day I will face that. And one day I will be challenged with this thought, what kind of God do you actually believe in, Bing? You've watched your parent perish in agony, suffering horrifically. And you might have said, well, I don't believe in that God of the Bible. Well, this morning, I have to tell you, that's not the God of the Bible. Because the God, it's far from it. This is why our Bibles are so vital. To correct what we may conclude incorrectly, far from it. He is not cruel, but he is compassionate. What death cruelly dealt, we will encounter a Christ who meets us in our grief.
- [13 : 21] Our great grief, and here it goes, is followed by God's great compassion. in verse 13. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, do not weep. A few observations. Did you notice that Christ's compassion is unprompted? It's not requested. It's not asked for. It's uninitiated. There is no demonstration of faith on the part of the woman. She did not see Jesus and run to him for help. In contrast to the power-filled centurion earlier in the chapter who sent two separate delegations who asked help from Jesus, the widow requests none. And yet Christ approached and Christ drew near. Perhaps she was so overcome by grief she could not ask. Perhaps her sorrow was so great it silenced her.
- [14 : 27] Or she thought what the pallbearers thought. What the entire funeral procession thought. After all, what can be done now?

Her only son is dead, lifeless, and gone. We need to get this body outside the city before it begins to decompose, stink, contaminate, make unclean all who come into contact with this body.

It is in this grief that God approaches and draws near. His words appear entirely insensitive, telling a grieving mother to hold back her tears to stop weeping.

Jesus approaches the bear. It's just like a stretcher burying a body and extends his hand. It halts the procession. The pallbearers immediately, already ceremonially unclean, must be taken aback that a stranger would dare reach out his hand.

It is one thing to touch the stretcher and make yourself religiously defiled. But what follows next appears to be the most outrageous.

[15 : 44] Jesus speaks. He doesn't speak to the mother.

He doesn't speak to the crowd. In the strangest of all actions, Jesus speaks to the dead.

Now imagine this with me. Let's just say a funeral of a esteemed person just took place at Rockefeller Chapel. The casket is rolled out to the exit.

The pallbearers load it into the back of the hearse and we are all on the front steps of Christ Church Chicago and the procession comes down Woodlawn and this individual will be buried at the historic Oakwood Cemetery and as the procession comes down Woodlawn Avenue and an individual emerges in the middle of the street to stop stop the hearse driver stops and this individual begins to speak not to the hearse but to the corpse in the casket embedded in the words our young man I say to you arise what is your conclusion?

What is your conclusion? Your conclusion is my conclusion. This guy's crazy. This person is crazy missing all sorts all the screws.

[17 : 28] this individual is not in their right mind. Why? Why? Well the answer is simple.

Dead men are deaf men. The dead are deaf. They cannot hear. Who in their right mind speaks to them?

You might see it. Maybe in a memorial service loved ones speaking to a body as if they could say their last words pour out their affection.

But we all know dead bodies are deaf bodies or so they thought until verse 15.

The Bible reads and the dead man sat up and began to speak and Jesus gave him to his mother. Verse 16 gives us the outcome.

[18 : 27] Fear sees them all. Terror is how we ought to interpret it. Who can even speak that the dead can hear? What authority does this Jesus have that the dead even respond to his command?

Well with a single sentence God demonstrates his authority to bring life out of death. In what the summation of all human technologies all medicine all medical advancements are trying to do and cannot do Jesus does with a word.

Jesus command revokes death's claim. What death had stolen Jesus returned. Jesus raises a corpse by the power of his own authoritative word.

The word of the Lord even penetrates the ears of the dead. And Luke wants us to be clear. Jesus has all authority even over death.

It's a surreal scene. Unbelievable. The only begotten son of the heavenly father returning the only beloved son of this widow.

[19 : 46] The crowd is rightly terrified. The crowd rightly glorifies. before them is this great prophet. The episode harkens back to a prophet in the Old Testament Elijah.

You can look it up in your homework this afternoon. 1 Kings chapter 17. There the prophet Elijah raises a dead widow's son.

At the conclusion of that account the widow concludes now I know you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord is true in your mouth. In other words you are God's man and what Luke is telling us here is Jesus is God's man.

The prophets were this vehicle that God used to use to deliver his message and demonstrate his power but with the arrival of Jesus the prophetic office stopped because the son is greater than the prophets.

The son would deliver God's message and demonstrate God's power. God had visited his people is the phrase verse 16. God is back is how we're supposed to read it.

[21 : 00] And the message on this occasion was one of compassion. The compassion of Christ meets us in our greatest grief particularly in that of death.

His compassion is ultimately displayed in the reclamation of lives lost to death. It meets us in our greatest griefs. If it meets us in our greatest griefs then be assured that his compassion will meet you in all your griefs.

The return of a son to his mother is what Jesus will continually do. Yes I do assert that on a future day the dead in Christ shall be raised and on that day sons will be returned to mothers and daughters will be reunited to fathers and loved ones will experience a reunion and relationship that was severed by death.

And I know some of us yearn to see mom again, long to see dad again. Our earthly weeping will be transformed into eternal joy.

Our mourning will be turned into laughing, our tears will cease. And if that was what this passage contained, it is a happily application but it is a short change of the text.

[22 : 30] My initial thought was wow, to see my loved ones again, what a joy. To see mom again, what a delight.

To see dad and embrace one more time. And that's true. But it's more than that. Because the great truth of this passage is that Jesus will raise all his brothers, will raise all his sisters, and return them to his father.

father. See, the picture is, oh, the compassion of Jesus to return a child to his mother. You need to know that the greatest work of the son is not this, is not reuniting with, I don't say, I don't want to say in this, but reuniting with little Johnny or Grandpa Joe.

Those are great. But the great task, the marvelous meaning of this passage is that Jesus will raise all his brothers and sisters and return them to his father, that all the sons and all the daughters, that God the father lost to the wages of sin, the consequences of our disobedience, and the rebellion in which we all die, he will raise us back up again.

We will be resurrected to new life and reunited with our father. Our dwelling will forever be with him. Heaven will burst forth in celebration and in future weeks you'll hear of this.

[24 : 08] Quick, bring the best robe, put the ring on his hand, shoes on his feet, kill the fattened calf, roast the steak, grill the sirloin. Why? Let us eat and celebrate.

Why? Because the son was dead and is alive again. The value of this text is not merely that loved ones who die in the Lord will be brought back together.

the beauty, the magnificence, the glory of this text is that for those whom Christ died will be reunited with their heavenly father.

So Jesus could say to the father, of those you gave me, I have not lost one, not one. And with his power he raises us from the dead.

In his compassion he restores us to the father. Forever we will be with him. This is the story of Christianity. He is no cruel God.

[25 : 11] He is compassionate. There is no one like him. This is the God of the Bible. Our great grief met by God's great compassion and here it goes. It's unleashed.

The gospel's great expansion verses 16 and 17. The people grasp this so they burst forth in worship. These are the words of one commentator. They are declaring their faith.

A great prophet has risen. God has visited. God has broken to the world and they have observed his compassion through Jesus.

Their worship can't be contained. The message can't be restrained. The good news can't be silenced. It would spread through the whole of Judea and the surrounding country.

Now get this. You're in the crowd. I don't know which crowd you're in, whether with Jesus or with the widow. You had met at the front gate of Nain and they all became evangelists.

[26 : 14] How do I know? Because this is how it makes sense. They were witnesses To the compassion of God meeting great human grief. Every funeral they attend would be different. Every casket they carried would be different.

Every funeral they partiqued in would be different. Every processional would become the very platform whereby the news would spread. Could you imagine this? You were there.

Another death occurs in town. And I say this tongue in cheek, but you know, you would want to say, you know, the last procession I was part of, this crazy thing happened.

This guy, God in the flesh, came and spoke to the body. And you know what? I thought he was crazy too, until the body got up.

And then the son returned to his mother. And the story would go. My next funeral would become a platform.

[27 : 20] Hey, I gotta tell you this thing. One time, I was following this Jesus guy. I thought he was a great teacher. We had just seen him do this crazy thing. Capernaum healed the sick servant.

And we followed him to Nain. And I mean, it was kind of sad because we were walking in and this exit party was lamenting the loss of the widow's only son. And then this guy talked, spoke to the you see, when you experience new life in Christ, every funeral is different.

Every conversation is different. Every grief is different. They would speak of the day when divine compassion met a human casket.

They would tell you of the one who commands the dead. They would tell you of the words young man arise. They are not special words.

It's not magical words. No, the words find their significance because of their source. They are uttered by Jesus and even the dead hear him.

[28 : 45] And one day he will say to you, say to me, young man, young woman, old man, old woman, arise, arise.

And that's the message you carry as I close. The world needs to hear that our great grief is met by God's great compassion in Christ.

It is this Jesus who will transform your death and change your life. Jesus changes lives.

Well, let us pray. Father, we thank you for this account and as now in your greatest act of compassion, giving your very life over to death so that we by faith may have life.

Impart that life to us this day, we pray. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.