

PM 1 Kings 17:17-24 & Luke 7:11-17

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Date: 20 September 2026

Preacher: Rev Duncan Peters

[0:00] I'd like us to read together from the Holy Bible. We have two quite short readings. First of all from the Old Testament.

And we'll read from verse 17 to the end of the chapter. So this is during the ministry of the prophet Elijah who lived in the 8th century before Christ.

His ministry as a prophet was during the reign of Ahab who was one of the worst, if not the worst, king of the northern kingdom of Israel.

This is after the kingdoms are divided into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. And as a result of the wickedness of Ahab and the nation there's a famine on the land which is one of the covenant curses.

And Elijah is sort of in hiding I suppose from Ahab. First of all he's at the brook Cherith and then he's told to go to Zarephath in Sidon.

[1:29] And to stay with a widow and her son in that place. So we're reading from verse 17. After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house became ill.

And this illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. And she said to Elijah, what have you against me, O man of God?

You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son. And he said to her, give me your son.

And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged and laid him on his own bed. And he cried to the Lord, O Lord my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourned by killing her son?

Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the Lord, O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again. And the Lord listened to the voice of Elijah.

[2:42] And the life of the child came into him again. And he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother.

And Elijah said, see, your son lives. And the woman said to Elijah, now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth.

And then a second reading from the New Testament from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 7. And we're reading from verse 11 to 16.

So that's on page 1040 of the church Bible. So Luke 7, 11 to 17. Soon afterward, Jesus 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.

[3:55] The only son of his mother. And she was a widow. And 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 the byre. 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 has visited his people. And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

May God bless to us those readings from his word. Let's join together again in prayer. Lord our God, we thank you for the privilege of prayer.

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That when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her. In the Gospels, Jesus performs many powerful acts.

Many wonders. Many signs. Many healings. And sometimes we're told what the motivation was.

Sometimes they're signs that point to Jesus' own authority.

Or signs of the arrival of God's kingdom. Sometimes they're for the glory of God. Sometimes Jesus responds to faith.

[16:24] To a request. But here, there's no faith. There's no expectation that Jesus or anybody can do anything in this situation. The initiative comes totally from Jesus himself.

And we're told that the motivation was compassion. The NIV translates it, that his heart went out to her. Now, if you read through the Gospels, you read of lots and lots of different healings of people. And it's perhaps obvious that you read it and you think, well, this man is a man of compassion. He has compassion on those who are struggling with illness and disability and sickness and even death.

But here, it's mentioned explicitly that what motivated Jesus, what moved him in this situation was his compassion.

The Greek word is really, it's to do with his intestines. It's a visceral reaction. He's literally gutted for this poor mother.

[17:31] Now, Jesus is fully human. He has human emotions of sympathy and compassion. And yet, Jesus also reveals to us the compassionate heart of God.

In Luke chapter 1, verse 78, in the song of Zechariah, who was the father of John the Baptist, a related word is used for God.

It speaks of the merciful heart of our God. And the word heart there is the same root word that's used for Jesus' compassion here.

So Jesus reveals the compassionate heart, the compassionate nature of God.

Now, Jesus knows that death is the wages of sin. That's the teaching of Scripture. But that in no way hinders or stops his compassion.

[18:36] Maybe you have a picture of God. Who is cold and uncaring. Who has a sort of mechanical justice.

And who just sort of thinks, well, death is the wages of human sinfulness. This woman is a sinner. Her son was a sinner. And this is just what happens. And you think of God as being distant and cold and mechanical.

Or maybe even worse, you think of a God who takes pleasure in punishing people. Well, nothing could be further from the truth of the whole Bible.

And nothing could be further from what we see here in the person of Jesus. Now, of course, God is just. God does judge sin and evil.

But God is not unmoved by human misery, by the human plight. Jesus is moved with compassion for this woman. And maybe you are here this evening with a broken heart.

[19:42] Maybe you're reeling from some tragedy. Something has gone wrong, badly wrong in your life. Or maybe it's more chronic than that. Maybe just life is tough for you.

Life is bitter. Life is disappointing. It's a grind. And you feel that you're carrying a heavy load. But what moved Jesus on this occasion for this poor widow is no less true for you.

His compassion. The book of Hebrews says that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. And so there is a Lord in heaven who looks on you and to whom you can go and he is filled with compassion for you.

Well then, Jesus says to her, do not weep or don't cry. And these words seem, at best, inappropriate in the circumstances.

And at worst, just downright insensitive. Why shouldn't she weep in these circumstances? But Jesus' words are a kind of prophetic anticipation of what he is going to do.

[21:01] This young man's mother can stop weeping because the cause of her weeping is about to be taken away. In the previous chapter, Jesus says, blessed are you who weep now for you will laugh.

And this woman is a prime example of that. Well, we come second to the power of Jesus. In verse 14, we read that Jesus came up and touched the bier.

That was probably just a plank of wood with the dead body laid on it and then a sheet over the dead body. Now then, as now, this is not what you do at a funeral.

You stand by respectfully. Or maybe you join the funeral procession. And in addition, in ancient Jewish society, contact with a corpse, the dead body, made you unclean. It made you unclean for seven days. And at the end of the seven days, you had to go through a purification ritual to be made ritually clean again.

[22 : 11] You can read about that in Numbers chapter 19. So Jesus' action here is strange. It's unexpected. And it's disruptive.

And you can feel the tension in the air. Those who were carrying the buyer stood still. They're unsure what to do. And you can kind of feel their embarrassment.

What do we do? This shouldn't happen. They don't know what to do. And then the crowd watch in astonishment as Jesus addresses the dead man.

Jesus said to him, Young man, I tell you, get up. And even more astonishingly, the dead man obeys. He gets up and begins to speak.

And so here we see both the compassion and the power of Jesus. In many situations, I'm sure you've been in situations where you feel really sorry for someone.

[23 : 18] And you wish you could help. You wish you could do something to help them. But you just feel there's nothing you can do in that situation. You're powerless. I remember near the beginning of the Gaza war, the then first minister, Hamza Yusuf.

He had family members stuck in Gaza. And as Gaza was being bombed and his basic resources were running out, the first minister, he was the most powerful politician in Scotland, he spoke of his feeling of helplessness and distress over the situation there in Gaza.

Well, Jesus feels distress for the mother. He feels great sympathy for her. He feels pity and compassion. But he is not helpless.

Jesus' compassion is equaled by his power. However, we've seen how touching the buyer, contact with a dead body, would normally make Jesus unclean for seven days.

And people would have been shocked by that, by his touching the buyer. But instead of uncleanness flowing from the corpse to Jesus, instead, Jesus' words give power and life back to the dead man.

[24 : 44] Jesus gives life back to the young man and Jesus gives the young man back to his mother. Of course, it was the mother's plight that moved Jesus in the first place.

And Jesus kindly, compassionately gives her son back to him, restores her to his mother. Well, third, we come to the response to Jesus.

I once attended a wedding. It wasn't in this country. It was in a foreign country. And the groom was there, and so was the bride.

And the guests were all present. Everyone was wearing their wedding clothes. Everyone was there, expectant. But the official who was meant to conduct the wedding didn't turn up.

And the wedding couldn't proceed without him. Finally, after a very long wait, the official did arrive. But he refused point blank to conduct the wedding.

[25 : 47] And then he left. And the whole occasion was left in confusion and disarray. And something like this must have happened at this funeral.

Jesus has utterly disrupted this solemn occasion. And there must have been confusion and disarray. But instead of dismay, how joy-filled that event must have been, Jesus has turned the funeral procession into a street party, into a celebration.

And Luke records the outcome and the response in verse 16. That fear seized them all.

Or that could be translated that awe. They were struck with awe. They were awe-struck. And they praised God. Or they glorified God, saying, A great prophet has arisen among us.

And God has visited his people. A great prophet has risen among us. Now, at the beginning, we used the illustrations of the fight between Buster Douglas and Mike Tyson and also David and Goliath.

[27 : 02] And those illustrations don't quite apply. Because there were two previous occasions recorded in the Old Testament when something similar to this took place.

When death was overturned. The prophets Elijah and Elisha, two of Israel's greatest prophets, both raised dead sons and restored them to their bereaved mothers.

And that's almost certainly in the minds of the crowd when they say, A great prophet has risen among us. Elijah, they thought back to how Elijah restored a dead boy to life and gave him back to his mother, who was also a widow.

Just like the mother in Nain. In fact, Luke 7.15, where Jesus gives the son back to his mother, it echoes exactly the words from the account in 1 Kings 17.

And they also would have thought of Elisha, who restored to life an only son and gave him back to his mother. That's in 2 Kings chapter 4. That took place in a place called Shunem, which is very close to Nain.

[28 : 22] In fact, Shunem is on the south side of the hill and Nain is on the north side of the same hill. So it's kind of local history repeating itself here.

And yet, Jesus' raising of this dead son and giving him back to his mother is not only like the similar miracles of Elijah and Elisha, it is also unlike those miracles.

Because Elijah and Elisha both prayed to God. We read how Elijah cried out to the Lord. And God answered their prayers by restoring life to the dead boys.

Jesus, by contrast, does not pray. He commands, young man, I tell you, arise or get up. And the young man, dead though he is, when Jesus addresses him, obeys and gets up.

And begins to speak. Jesus displays a power and authority, a personal authority, that even the greatest prophets of old did not have.

[29 : 40] And then the crowd also say that God has visited his people. Different English translations translate it differently. Some translate that God has come to help his people.

Or God has looked favorably on his people. And the reason for the different translations is that it kind of reflects the broad range of meaning of the word that this version translates, visit.

The word can mean look at, examine, inspect, look for, go to see, visit, look after, or be concerned about. It has that broad range of meaning.

And we can be almost certain that the crowd do not understand Jesus to be God in person, come among them, what we would call the incarnation. That's not what they're thinking of here.

In fact, the same phrase is used in connection with Moses and Aaron in Exodus chapter 4 of God visiting, but through the ministry of Moses and Aaron. Now they see Jesus as a prophet and that God has come to help his people through Jesus.

[30 : 50] But Luke wants us to hear an echo of, again, of Zechariah's song in Luke chapter 1. Verse 68 of that, Zechariah says, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people.

And then a bit later on in the same song, he speaks of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high.

And perhaps Luke is kind of playing with the ambiguity of this word, this phrase. that, you know, can have all these different meanings and the crowd don't mean it in terms of God personally visiting the people there.

But I think Luke is kind of using it, he's playing with the word, the ambiguity of it and suggesting that maybe this crowd were actually kind of saying something more than they knew. Luke is happy to agree with the crowd that Jesus is a prophet, but he's not content to leave the question of Jesus' identity there.

Luke has the benefit of hindsight and the much bigger picture than the crowd have here. Luke has the benefit of, you know, the whole of Jesus' ministry and, of course, especially his resurrection from the dead.

[32 : 10] And here, for the first time, Luke, as the narrator, the storyteller, begins a practice that he repeats several times after this. He refers to Jesus as the Lord.

Now, the other Gospels don't do this. Matthew and Mark never do this. John does it, I think, maybe once or twice. But Luke does it several times in his Gospel.

And here's the first time in verse 13, when the Lord saw her, he was moved with compassion for her. And this title or term or even name, the Lord, is Luke's favourite term or title for Jesus.

And, again, Luke sort of plays with the ambiguity of it because the word can be used of a human boss or a human master. But also, it was the word that was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to translate the divine name, the name Yahweh, the name of God.

So, in Luke chapters 1 and 2, the Lord is mentioned 25 times. 23 of those times it refers to the Lord God. The other two times it refers to Jesus.

[33 : 27] And then in Luke chapter 3, Luke there writes about the ministry of John the Baptist. And when he's speaking about John the Baptist's ministry, he quotes from Isaiah chapter 40, verse 3.

And the words may well be familiar to you, about the voice calling in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord. And in Isaiah 40, verse 3, the Lord there is translating the name, Yahweh, the name of God, the unique name of God.

But in Luke 3, the way Luke is using that quote from Isaiah 40, the voice calling in the wilderness is the voice of John the Baptist. That's who it refers to.

It's very clear if you read Luke 3. And in the flow of Luke's gospel, who does John the Baptist prepare the way for? Well, it's for the Lord Jesus.

And so, when Luke describes Jesus as the Lord, he is subtly indicating his own estimation of Jesus, that he is the Lord God, that he is Yahweh, come to us in human form, in human flesh.

[34 : 40] That the way of the Lord is to become human and to make his dwelling among us.

It's what we call the incarnation. And the remarkable thing is that Luke, as narrator, first uses this title for Jesus in this context, in the context of Jesus' compassion.

When the Lord saw her, he was moved with compassion for her. And indeed, it was compassion that motivated the whole of Jesus' mission of seeking and saving the lost up to its climax in his dying for us and his giving his life for us.

What moved him to do that was his compassion for us in our need, in our sin. And also, Jesus' power is demonstrated ultimately in his own resurrection from the dead.

And this raising of the widow of Nain's son, like all of Jesus' healing ministry, is a trailer of the ultimate healing and the resurrection of his people.

[35 : 52] Not to die again as this young man would do in the course of time, but it's a trailer of that resurrection to everlasting life, to everlasting healing and salvation that Jesus Christ will bring in when he returns.

And that is the hope of all believers in Christ. And this event is a trailer of that. of Jesus Christ. finally, in verse 16, the response of the crowd is awe and fear.

That should also be our response in the presence of Jesus Christ. He is a prophet. We believe that he is a prophet. And that means that we believe his message, that we read his message, that we study his message, that we trust it, that we obey it.

and then also as we saw that God has visited his people in a way that the crowd didn't understand what they were saying or at least that sense of what they were saying.

But we know from our perspective that God has visited his people in and as the person of Jesus Christ. And so we should offer Jesus the devotion, the worship that is due to the only God.

[37 : 09] And then finally in verse 17, we read about the report about him spread throughout the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. And our response should be to spread the word about the Lord Jesus, the Lord of compassion.

Amen. May God bless his word to us. Let us conclude