

Luke 7:11-17 - Darkness Interrupted

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- If you have your Bibles with you, open them to the Gospel of Luke as we continue our study. Once again, we'll be reading in Luke 7, beginning at verse 11 and reading down through verse 17.
- If you don't have a Bible, you'll see the words on the screen so you can follow along as I read. So here now, the Gospels, we see it, we hear it from Luke 7, beginning at verse 11.
- Soon afterward, he went to a town called Nain. And his disciples and a great crowd went with him. And he drew near to the gate of the town.
- 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.
- [1 : 1 3] And a considerable crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her. And he said to her, do not weep.
- Then he came up and touched the 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. And 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.
- As we just sang to cling to the crucified, let's pray together as I lead us that indeed as we go through the study of his word, that is where he'll take us to the crucified.
- [2 : 2 0] Let's pray. Father, would you grant us the gift of your spirit? Would you help us to know you? Would you open up your word to us?
- We come in here to this place with so many things that potentially could distract us, could take our attention, could draw us away.
- But Father, would you pierce through all that? Would you shine the light of truth into our hearts? But not just truth.
- Would you shine the light of your glory? All that you are. And draw us into a deeper, fuller knowledge of you.
- Would you reveal to us the crucified? The one who died. The one who died. The one who lived for us. But yet the one who was raised.
- [3 : 2 5] Would you draw us to him? And we pray in the name of the living word, our Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen. You know, if you remember back a couple months ago, as we were going through Luke, we were in chapter 4.
- And Jesus, as his ministry commenced, he preached his first sermon at a synagogue in Nazareth. And he quoted, he read words from Isaiah the prophet, Isaiah 61.

And as Luke gives it to us in chapter 4, verses 18 and 19, Jesus said this. He said, Of course, right after reading these words, he takes his hearers back farther into the Old Testament, and tells them two stories.

Stories of which almost got him killed prematurely. Of course, we know that was not going to happen, but still. One of those stories was about a Syrian general named Naaman.

And Naaman had leprosy. And Naaman went to, heard of this great healing power that was with Elisha.

[5 : 08] And so he went to Israel to see Elisha that he might be cured. And we see a parallel of that story in the story that we looked at last week with the Roman centurion and his servant.

This week, we see another parallel because the other story that Jesus referred to was a widow in Sidon.

A non-Jew who had an only son who died. And she called on help from Elijah, the great prophet.

And Elijah, through a miraculous intervention of the Spirit of God, was able to raise this widow's son from the dead.

And here, now we see another parallel. And so what is Jesus doing in all this? Jesus is drawing direct parallels to this time where God came and visited his people.

[6 : 25] In those particular stories with the widow of Sidon and Naaman the Syrian demonstrated this.

But now Luke is doing the same thing. Except he's doing it in an even bigger way.

Because now it's not just a great prophet that has come to Israel. But God himself.

The key, the main theme of all that Jesus was coming to do, we see in that sermon, in those words that he spoke way back in Nazareth.

In chapter 4. And the theme is this. Is that I, the Redeemer, have come to bring release. Release from the captives.

[7 : 20] Release from those who are oppressed. And in these two accounts that we see of the centurion and this widow from Nain. We see the ministry of release that Jesus proclaimed is now demonstrated in a very tangible form.

And so we not only hear about release that's coming, we see it. And so this is what I want to turn our attention to, particularly in this story of the widow.

How we see redemption unfold in these very tangible situations. The first thing I want us to see here is how in redemption despair is turned to hope.

What we've got here is a story of a widow. And this is a very, this is a far more desperate situation that you might initially realize.

For a widow, a widow in that culture was in many ways the most desperate of people. A woman was dependent upon her husband to not only provide for her and to care for her and all of her material needs.

[8 : 41] She really found much of her place in society through him. And then if something happened to him, then her son, her offspring would then take care of her for the rest of her days.

This woman is on her way to a funeral. And unfortunately, it's a path she's already been on once before.

She had a husband and one son. Her husband, we don't know how long ago, died. But it wasn't that terribly long ago because this man who was on this funeral bar was a young man.

The words that are used here is that he was more likely a teenager who died very prematurely. And so now she is at the head of this large procession coming out of this village.

A most desperate, helpless, alone widow. And you imagine, I mean, the grief that she bears over losing a son.

[10 : 04] And I know some of you here have experienced that. But that grief was just multiplied because she is now looking at hopelessness.

She has no one. No one to care for her. No one to provide for her. She is a most desperate woman.

And so to this widow, Jesus brings the ministry of release. He meets her.

And it's interesting. This whole setting, it's like there's a collision of two worlds. You see this great crowd of people coming out of the city, out of the gate of the village, right when another crowd is just about to come.

And so they meet with Jesus right in the middle. And Jesus does three things. The first thing he does, if you look at the text, he says he felt compassion.

[11 : 18] And I love that, but this is a strong word. In other words, Jesus felt this woman's pain and desperation and hopelessness down in his gut.

He embraced her pain. He knew her pain. This is what we would call empathy. But yet even more than that.

He had compassion on her. He was willing to enter into that pain to the point that he knew what she felt.

He didn't hurt just for her. He hurt with her. When Jesus comes to us, he doesn't just know about our struggle.

He knows our struggle. He knows it personally. He knows it intimately. He enters into it.

[12 : 20] And he doesn't just throw little help grenades from the outside. But he dives into it himself and helps us there.

You know, how can he enter into this kind of pain? How can he do that even with us? Well, with this woman in particular, he knows.

He knows. And he will know very, very soon. Because of his close relationship with his father, who will lose his only son.

But in this life, Jesus comes in full humanity. He comes into our world. He doesn't help us from afar.

He comes into life to help us. He knows what it means for us to hurt. I love the words from Hebrews 4, verse 15 through 16, where the writer there says, For 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.

[13 : 36] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. You know, some years ago when we lived overseas, that was a really hard time for me.

It was a time where I struggled with depression because life was just hard. I got some severe tension headaches every time I heard the gate bell ring and somebody speaking Hungarian.

Because I didn't know if they were come collecting money or they were going to turn off my water or what. But you add all this stuff, it was really hard. And so I looked to find some help, somebody to talk to, somebody that I can engage with.

To guide me and just help steer me through this really hard time. But I wanted somebody who had lived as a missionary, who had struggled as a missionary, who had followed Christ faithfully as a missionary.

I wanted someone, I had to have somebody who understood, who knew what I was going through because they had been where I was.

[14 : 54] But that's what we get with Jesus. He has been tempted in every way. He has faced every struggle. He knows. He knows. Intimately and personally.

Just like he did with this woman. But the second thing he does with her is he tells her to stop crying. And you might think this a little strange.

I mean, if I was at a funeral and I walked up to the, to a widow who had just lost her husband and said, ah, stop crying, I'd probably get slapped. And I should.

So what, what's Jesus doing here? Well, there's, the big difference here with him is that he knew what was coming. He knew what was about to happen.

And because he knows the end of the story, he can say, hey, hey, don't cry. Just wait and see what's coming.

[16 : 08] She was about to experience something that was beyond her wildest imaginations because her dead son she was going to walk home with in just a few minutes.

You know, we see throughout the scriptures what Jesus tells us. He commands us over and over and over again to rejoice. To celebrate.

To be filled with joy. Rejoice. Again, I'll say rejoice. Though your life may be full of trouble right now. Rejoice.

And we think, what? But those commands to rejoice point us to something. And he tells us to rejoice because he knows the end of the story.

He's not just caught up in the moment. He knows where it's all going. And in a sense, what he's saying to us is, guys, just wait.

[17 : 16] Just wait a minute. What's coming is beyond your wildest imagination. Just hang on.

Rejoice. Oh, it's going to be good. He knows the rest of the story. This is one of the things I love about being a Christian.

You know, oftentimes we're, you go buy a book and the last thing you were tempted to jump to the end and read that final chapter because I want to know who did it. I don't know how it was done.

And then you maybe go back and read the rest. But we know that takes a lot of the fun and the mystery out of the story. Well, Jesus does that for us intentionally. He says, read the end. It's good.

And then go back and look at the rest. And so even though we struggle, even though we're in the midst of pain and hardship at the moment, Jesus said, hang on.

[18 : 25] Story's not over. It ends up really good. You know, but then finally, Jesus says to the son, I love this.

He says, not to the woman, but to the son. He says, I say to you, arise. And as soon as he does it, or before he does it, he does something else.

If you'll notice this little detail here is that he reaches out and touches the buyer. That is, it's kind of like a stretcher or a platform that is carrying this dead body.

And Jesus reaches out and touches it. You're not supposed to do that. Because anything that touches that, anything that's associated with death can ceremonially pollute and make unclean whoever touches it.

Jesus intentionally, he could have told the guys carrying it, just say, hold up a second. He doesn't do that. He touches it.

[19 : 32] Why is this? It's because he is about to enter into this very death of this young man.

And he's, it also says that Jesus gives him back to his mother. And he does so because this son's death.

Jesus just made his own. He touched it because he was taking that death upon himself. He was going to die.

But he also was going to be raised. As we see the young man sitting up. But this is what Jesus has come to do.

He has come to enter into the darkness, enter into our hopelessness, enter into our struggle. And he embraces it and takes it upon himself.

[20 : 38] He doesn't just tell us about it. He makes it his own. And he breaks the hold. And he gives us release.

So what are we struggling with? Something going on in your life that's kind of given you a sense of hopelessness, a sense of struggle, and says, you don't know what you're going to do. You don't know where you're going to go.

You don't know how you're going to get out of this. You need somebody to set you free. Jesus enters into that. And he says, come to me.

I made it my own. So that you can now be set free. Jesus not only replaces hopelessness or despair with hope.

He also replaces death with life. And this is the second thing we have to know. This is a head-on collision between this crowd and this woman.

[21 : 51] And this woman following this path that's become all too familiar, heading to the graveyard, heading to the grave where the son was going to be laid.

And the only thing that was standing in her way was Jesus. And Jesus stopped everything. That young man was going to be laid next to his father, except today, Jesus interrupted that journey.

You know, Hebrews 2, or Hebrews 2, excuse me, verse 14 and 15 says this. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

You know, this is the part of the sermon that not too many preachers really like to preach, to preach about death. But there's something pretty critical for us to understand.

Because unfortunately, if you haven't heard or gotten the memo, all of us are going to face death. It is part of the curse that we have inherited from Adam because of his disobedience.

[23 : 28] He was promised death in all of those who follow him. And because he didn't do what he was supposed to, every one of us have a common, a common end.

And we can't avoid it. We are cursed with death. But yet it's the fear of death that enslaves us.

I mean, we will do anything. What? You don't talk about it. You don't want to think about it. We're doing everything we can to avoid it.

You know, our medicine cabinets are full of drugs which are designed to put it off. We go to the health club to try to stop the aging process.

We do everything we can to avoid it. But in so much of life death lives under the control or the shadow of death.

[24 : 44] Death is the end. We know that when that time comes, all second chances are over. we're going to stand and face our maker.

I honestly think that's the part that scares us the most. But it's all going to be done and we're going to give account for how we've lived.

And that thought for some of us sends chills through our bones. Because we know we deserve it.

But that's the road we're headed to and the final verdict. And boy, aren't you encouraged. So we avoid talking about it.

We don't want to think about it. We make jokes about it to kind of just ease our tension and the fear. And so and that's where we're headed when this life is over.

[26 : 01] Unless we meet Jesus on the way. And if we meet Jesus on the way he could disrupt everything.

Even our journey to the grave. You know, and again, that's it goes back to Jesus even touching, entering into this man's death.

Very intentionally. He touched it because in that short time he would be the dead son.

You know, I hate death. Sort of. You know, a couple years ago I was diagnosed with cancer.

Fortunately, in my case, it was the kind that was very easily cured. word. And, you know, you go have surgery and it's over and it's done. It's not always the case.

[27 : 11] But there's something about that C word that when we hear it, especially in relationship to us, that is like a kick in the gut. But I remember thinking about it.

I was standing in my bathroom doorway one day, it was just right after, and I thought about it and all of a sudden this thought went through my mind and it says, um, this might be it.

This just might be my ticket home. And strangely, I started feeling not terrified, but giddy.

Because I knew what that meant was I could very soon be in the arms of my true love.

I mean, I would hate it because of the pain that my family would experience, especially my dear bride. But there was something inside that said, yes!

[28 : 32] Finally! All the struggle here is going to be over. I'm going to be home with the one that I loved. Because Jesus met me on the way to the grave.

When I was dead, Jesus spoke and brought life. Because there is life on the other side.

A life so rich and deep it is beyond imagination. the one whom I loved and placed my hope, the one who died in my place, who tasted death for me, the one who was raised to new life for me, I would see with outstretched arms welcoming me home.

and that only comes about when we meet Jesus. Facing our hope in a hope that supersedes all fear and that kind of hope can set us free from this fear of death that enslaves us.

Because the only begotten son took the place of that widow's son and became the son who died instead.

[30 : 21] And suffered death to its fullest degree. and now offers us life to its fullest degree. So, have you met him?

You know, in a way, I really want to speak to some of you younger ones. You know, and this is not at all to scare you, but it is to bring some sobriety because when we're young, we think we're indestructible, we think we're invulnerable.

And we don't think about this at all. But unfortunately, it's a reality. I've been to funerals of young ones who were taken way before their time.

I've been to funerals from older folks who die of disease or those who have even taken their own lives. and funerals are good because they remind us of this end and they call us to be sober.

One of the scriptures that we see in Psalm 90 verse 12, Moses writes in this Psalm, teach us to number our days so that we can have a heart of wisdom.

[31 : 52] wisdom is knowing that we're vulnerable. Wisdom is knowing that we are not immortal. Wisdom is knowing that our days are numbered and how are we going to face that reality?

Well, see, it's a good thing if we've met Jesus because he takes that place. One more thing.

We see dread becomes faith. In the last couple of verses, the people that respond to this miracle, when Jesus raises this young man from the dead, he raised him up and the response of the people is almost verbatim what the people said or the woman, the widow from Sidon said when Elijah raised her son.

He says a great prophet has come to his people. God has visited his people. And so this is really the message.

it brings us to that identity of Jesus. And as we're facing life and we're facing all that is about it, who is this Jesus?

[33 : 21] And this is what we have to come to terms with. The people thought a great prophet had risen. Well, Jesus is more than a great prophet.

prophet. He has to be because a great prophet is not going to be the answer for our eternity. If you think that Jesus is just a great prophet, a great moral person, a great teacher, that's fine.

You'll learn some things, but that's not going to help because we need release from much bigger things. We need release from not only the struggles of this life, but what is to come.

And Jesus can help us because he's not just a great prophet, but God has visited his people.

God himself has come. God himself has entered into the darkness, the curse of this world and this life, and he has embraced it as his own.

[34 : 44] And now has put it to death through his death. And he's bringing light into the darkness. Christ. Have you embraced this Christ? Is this who Jesus is? Well, it is who he is.

And he now invites you to come. To come to him, to give you release from your fears, to give you release from your struggle and hopelessness and impotence to deal with the struggles of life.

Come. God has visited his people. Come to the one who is crucified.

Come to the one who was raised. Come to the one who ascended. Come to the one who now reigns even over death itself.

[35 : 53] come to the redeemer as we pray together. Father, would you give us eyes to see the crucified?

Would you give us eyes to see that you have visited? And would you shine the light into our darkness and drive it away that we might know the light of life?

Would you shine the light of your glory into our darkness so that even in the struggles of this life, we might rejoice because we have real hope?

And if there are those here who do not know you, would you pull back the darkness, push back the darkness, shine the light of your glory, and invite them home to the place they were made for.

Do this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.