

Luke 7:1-17

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[0 : 00] Benjamin Franklin, in a letter in 1789, said this, Our new constitution is now established and has an appearance that promises permanency.

But in this world, nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes. And so if you ever wondered where it came from, this is where at least most of the internet thinks it came from.

And we're not talking about taxes today, which means that we are talking about death. And what does it look like to face death? Taxes will be another week. We'll get there.

It's in the Gospels too. It's an interesting thing to think about. We live in a culture today in particular where death is often distant from us. In fact, there was a book in 1974, a guy named Ernst Becker. I've read the summaries of it, not the whole thing, but it's called The Denial of Death. He was a sociologist, psychologist, and philosopher who sought to explore the way that death shapes us, whether we want it to or not.

[1 : 33] And how often in our culture when we seek to deny death, how much yet still it drives us. How much it affects the way we live our everyday life, the things we aspire to, the things we hope for.

How does it influence us? Let's explore this a little bit. I think first, the reality of death makes us insecure. We realize that our life is finite.

That we are like the grass here today and gone tomorrow. And we wonder, does my life have meaning? Does it have purpose? Am I important? If I'm gone, will anyone remember me?

And in doing so, it drives us, I think. It drives us to live lives, to try to produce memorials.

To try to make a difference and build a monument. Or to find some kind of significance in our life. Think about this.

[2 : 45] If you lived forever, how concerned would you be about finding the right spouse? About how you serve humanity this week, this year. Whether your career would pan out or not.

If you lived forever, how would it be different? But in fact, the shortness, the finitude of our life, shapes how we think about these things.

There's a scene, the end of Saving Private Ryan. You know the story. Private Ryan, one of four survivors. Only one of four men in a family.

Four boys who fought in World War II. Three of them died within a week. He was the last one. The whole movie is about a small squad of men who went to find him.

And to save him. To bring him home. But the final scene of the movie is Private Ryan, having lived his whole life under the burden of what the colonel had told him.

[3 : 45] The colonel who had found him. Who had died. Who had said, earn this. And this man, standing before this colonel's tombstone, looks at his wife and says, tell me.

Tell me I've lived a good life. Tell me I'm a good man. And I think, friends, this is what death does to us.

It drives us in those ways. I think there's another way that death can affect how we live our lives. I think that death makes us impatient.

In our culture today in particular, death doesn't make us live for eternity. Death makes us live for now. Run it through the rubric of those grand dynamics of life.

Sex, power, and money. How easy is it today in our culture to think that I could live a lifetime of celibacy?

[4 : 53] How many of you feel the pressure? When am I going to have that relationship? If you're in high school, how much pressure do you feel? You've got to get there.

This is what, this is, you're not going to live forever. You got to get it now. For those of you who've been married for a while, how much cultural weight is there behind the, is it really working for you?

There's probably something better out there. You better get it now. Get it while you can, because it's not going to last forever. You might be stuck in this for the rest of your life. Can you handle that? When we have these short time frames, it puts pressure on how we think.

How about money? Some of you are workaholics. You can rest when you're dead. Well, what are you working for?

Is it because you want to build a monument? Is it because you're pursuing the good life now, and you think, I've got to do whatever it takes to do that? To get the money, to get the position, to get the prestige?

[6 : 14] How about power? How many of you think, if only I had control over my life, then I could get through it? If I only have this much money, I need to amass as much control as I can, so that I can do exactly what I think I need to do, because I only have 60, 70, 80 years.

And then I'm going to be gone. And we spend our lives pursuing, in various ways, control. Control over relationships.

Control over our physical comfort, and our well-being. Control over the way other people view us, and see us. We seek power in various ways, so that we might be, fulfilled, in this life.

So, if death makes us insecure, and death makes us impatient, it also can make us despair. For those of us who are willing to forsake, the denial of death, we face it firmly, and it overwhelms us. Think of the character Denethor, in the Lord of the Rings. The King of Gondor. No, not the King, right? The Steward. The Steward of Gondor, maintaining the last defense, against the forces of darkness.

[7 : 35] And yet, he has seen the future, or he thinks he has, and he thinks that it is full of death, and destruction. And in doing so, he gives up the fight. He abandons his post.

He takes his ill, but not yet dead son, and goes to the funeral halls, to burn himself, and his son, in a fey mood. What's the point in fighting?

We're all going to die anyway. Why not die now? And friends, if we don't take that route, maybe we just make peace, with joyless drudgery.

It's not going to get any better. We're like puddle glums. Nope, it's going to be bad. Nope, it's going to be bad. What else did you expect? Life is hard. And we live in a despair, that comes from disappointment, in this world.

And then some of us, look at that despair, and we think, I can't handle it. I'm going to turn on the TV. Or have another drink. Or worse.

[8 : 43] Maybe we turn on the video game, and lose ourselves, in some adventure, for hours, and hours, till the middle of the night.

Not that I've never done this, but, do we ever run, from death, by seeking to anesthetize our souls? Friends, I believe that death shapes us, in many, many ways. It is for not, it is for, it is not for nothing, that the Bible calls death, the last enemy, of life.

It is an enemy of life. It is not the way, it was supposed to be, in the beginning. It is something, to be fought against. But it raises a question for us, what difference would it make, if death was not the last word?

How would we be different, if we knew, one who had power, over death? And this, friends, leads us, to our text this morning. We're in our series, in the book of Luke, we're in chapter 7, page 863, in your pew Bibles.

[10 : 01] And as we look at these two, the first two stories, in chapter 7, starting in verse 1, we're going to see Jesus, in the face of death. And as we've been seeing, this whole section in Luke, he's trying to give us, a portrait of who this Jesus is.

He started in chapter 4, reading from the prophet Isaiah, about one who would come, and help the lame to walk, and set the captives free. And now Luke is, illustrating that, by the life, that Jesus lived, in his ministry on earth.

He's giving us pictures, of who this Jesus is. So let's read this passage together. Luke chapter 7, verse 1.

After he had finished, all his sayings, in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. Now a centurion, had a servant, who was sick, and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. When the centurion, heard about Jesus, he sent to him, elders of the Jews, asking him, to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him, earnestly saying, he is worthy to have you do this for him.

[11 : 15] He is worthy to have you do this for him. For he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us, our synagogue. And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

Therefore, I did not presume to come to you, but say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me.

And I say to one, go, and he goes, and to another, come, and he comes. And to my servant, do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him.

And turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

Soon afterwards, 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.

[12 : 28] 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. And he came up and touched the bier, and the bearer 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 risen among us, and God has visited his people. And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea, and all the surrounding country.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word. We ask that this morning, you would open our eyes, and our hearts, and our minds, Lord, that we might see you clearly, and that we would respond to you, in faith, and worship, because we know more of you.

Lord, I pray you would use me this morning, to make your word clear, and that your spirit would teach all of us, about what a savior you are for us. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

[13 : 41] Amen. Amen. Jesus, in the face of death, displays his authority, and his compassion, as he addresses death, and shows himself to be the one who has the power over death.

So let's look at these things. The first story, is about an outsider, a Roman centurion, who had made himself, a friend, of the Jewish people.

And he had a sick servant. This was the crisis. One of his beloved servants was sick. And this centurion, having heard about Jesus, sent a delegation, which isn't a backdoor channel thing, it's simply a polite way of interacting with someone, in those days, particularly because he had, a standing and reputation, and a relationship with the Jewish community, sent the Jewish elders and said, would you ask Jesus, if you would come and help?

And the response, I will come. To stop for a minute, I want to just interject a few thoughts, as we walk through this passage. Friends, when you're facing a trial, when you're facing something, that's difficult, where do you turn?

Do you ever think, oh, where is Jesus? How can he help me in this? Do we tend to gripe, or complain, or fix it ourselves, think that we're alone in it?

[15 : 10] The centurion, turns to Jesus, and says, Jesus, will you help? And so you think, this is going to be, Jesus will show up, and heal the servant, that'll be a nice story, but that's not it.

The elders, as they go, they say, this man is worthy, for you to do it. But then as Jesus draws near to the house, the man sends his friends, and says, Jesus, wait, don't come anymore, I'm not worthy. Though those around him, viewed him with great esteem, he had a great humility, before Jesus. He knew, that he didn't deserve, to have Jesus in his house.

And so he sent him, and part of the reason, why he had this humility, is because he recognized, something about Jesus. He recognized, that Jesus had authority. Look with me, at what he says. Starting verse six. I'm not worthy, for you to have you, come under my roof, therefore I did not presume, to come to you, but say the word, and let my servant be healed, for I too am a man, set under authority.

[16 : 14] That is, I too have a role of authority, and I recognize, that you do too. You have a kind of authority here. You have an authority, like mine.

I say to my servant, or to my soldiers, do this, go here, go there, and they do it. Like, I imagine Mark Zuckerberg, at Facebook, when he says, let's do this, people don't go say, I don't know, let's not do

that.

I think they say, yes sir Mr. Zuckerberg, right away. Or maybe, I don't know, maybe he's a little post, modern leader, and it doesn't quite work that way, but how about, if you were a football player, on Bill Belichick, or Bill Parcell's team, had to go on both ways, right?

New York, Boston, got both of them going, right? If you're a, if you're a player, and you play for one of these coaches, you either do what they say, you get off the field.

They wield a kind of authority, where you go here, you do this, you do that, because they say so.

And the centurion is looking at Jesus saying, you have that authority, over life, and death.

[17 : 25] You have that authority, over sickness, and health. You have that authority, to speak, and it will happen. And Jesus marvels at this.

Jesus only marvels three times, in the whole scripture, and this is the only time, he marvels at something positive. The other two times, he's marveling at people's unbelief. But here, he marvels, and not at a Jewish person, who recognizes his Messiah has come, but at a complete outsider.

Someone who knows, that he is not worthy. And Jesus looks at him, and he marvels, at his faith.

And of course, interestingly, in a very understated way, Luke says, well of course he's right.

Because when these people, got back to the house, what did they find? The servant was healed.

Interestingly, you don't even see the moment. In many other healing stories, in the gospels, you see Jesus, touching the man, speaking the word, doing something, and it happens.

Here, you don't even see that. But what you see, is a man who recognized, that Jesus had authority. And think about how he did it.

[18 : 42] He was far away. He didn't even know, what the sickness was. He couldn't touch him. He couldn't diagnose him. He couldn't do a physical examination. None of the normal things. The authority that Jesus exerted, in this healing, is greater than almost any other.

Because he did it from far away. Friends, the centurion, sees that Jesus has authority, over life and death.

Which poses the question for us, if he has authority, over life and death, what does he not, have authority over? Do you believe it?

Do you believe that he has authority, over all of your life? All of your circumstances? All of the people, who have authority over you, are under his authority?

All of the responsibilities, and the trials, that you face, are under his authority? authority, how often, do you try to be, your own authority, in your life?

[19 : 49] How often do you trust, in other things? As Lydia prayed earlier, little saviors, that cannot save, rather than him.

But Luke goes on, not only does Jesus, have authority, over sickness and death, in this way, but then he goes on, to this second story. Jesus travels, from Capernaum, probably 25 or so miles, to this city.

He arrives there, at the end of the day, and he encounters, a funeral procession. Jesus takes it all in, in a moment. Luke describes it, with great brevity.

Verse 12, look with me. A man had died, and was being carried out. He probably would have died, that day, they would have buried him, at the end of the day, that he had died on. But here's the description.

He's the only son, of his mother. Which means, that with his death, there's no progeny left. And she was a widow, which meant, that she had no husband, and so in her society, was completely vulnerable, unprotected, and unprovided for.

[21 : 06] Jesus takes all of this in, and he sees her. He sees her in a situation, where it sure feels like, death has won.

And she's the loser, in the battle, on this day. And he steps in. You see verse 13?

When he sees her, he has compassion, upon her. friends, friends, when you think, death is won in your life, whether it's the loss, of a loved one, whether it's the loss, of hopes and dreams, whether it's the loss, of abilities, as you grow old, whether it's the loss, of opportunities, as jobs, as doors close, whether it's the loss, of jobs, or positions, or roles in your life.

Do you think Jesus cares? Here, Jesus looks, at a situation, where it seems like, death is won. And the first thing he does, is he has compassion.

He says, I do care. But he doesn't just care, from afar. But in a beautiful, I want you to picture this scene, this would be a great movie scene, right?

[22 : 32] The funeral procession, is going out of the town gate, probably out to the graveyard, outside the city walls. They're mourning, they're wailing, the woman is probably walking ahead, covered in black, alone.

And Jesus steps in, to the procession of death, and he stops it. And he looks at the woman, and says, don't weep, which doesn't make any sense, unless he's going to do, what he's about to do. And then he steps in, and he touches the funeral beer. And if you were a Jewish person, you would never do that. Numbers 19 would say, you are defiled, by touching, a dead body. And Jesus enters, into even the defilement, of death, by stopping the procession, and touching the beer. And then he looks at the man, and he commands death, to depart. And he commands, a lifeless body, and a soul, to be brought back together, and brought back to life. Jesus is knitting back together, what death has torn us under, in this person, in this man.

[23 : 47] And he calls him, to arise. Have you ever been to a viewing?

I've been to too many, recently. Have you ever seen, a dead body? I'm sure some of you have. It's very sobering.

It's very helpful, I find. Helpful to recognize, what death is. Because when you see, that body lying there, and you realize, there's no more life in it.

And the person, who you loved, the person who you knew, is no longer there. Remarkably, Jesus steps in, and he can take that body, and bring it back to life.

And so Luke, if you read this, with a literary eye, he makes this funny statement. He says, the dead man sat up. Have you ever thought about, how incomprehensible that is?

[24 : 55] The dead man sat up. Well, the dead man sat up, because he was no longer dead. He was alive, and he began to speak, just in case you thought, this was some, muscular, contraction, post mortis.

And he begins to speak, and it's clear, that Jesus has brought him, back to life. And in a situation, where just moments before, it seemed that death had won, and there was only, mourning, and darkness.

Instead, there is wonder, and joy. The man sits up, and speaks. Jesus takes him, gives him back, to his mother, restoring her, restoring her hope, restoring her provision, and her protection, restoring her place, in society.

And the people around, are filled with awe. who is this man, who can do this? God, has visited us. God has sent us a prophet, ringing in their ears, of the stories, of Elisha, and Elijah, and how they raised, the widow's sons, from the dead.

God has sent us, another prophet, like that. He is with us. God has sent us, and they rejoice, and they worship him. Jesus, in the face of death, shows that he has the authority, over death.

[26 : 27] He can step in, and bring life, again, where there is, where it seems that death, has had victory. Now, we need to acknowledge, these men, the servant, and the son, they both died.

They were not raised, to eternal life. Jesus is not, permanently, defeating death, in these moments. But instead, he is displaying himself, as the one, who will have power, over life and death. The precursor, of a greater, resurrection, of a greater, and eternal life, that is to come.

He may heal, in this life, he may not. But the question, that these passages, put before us, is not, will he heal me now? Will he raise me now?

It is not, can I keep this life, that God has given me, as long as I can? But more, can I keep the God, of life, forever? forever. That's the question, that this passage, asks us to see.

[27 : 39] This is what, this is the Jesus, that Luke, wants us to see. One who has compassion, over us, in the face of death. One who has real, authority, over it.

Who is able to bring, to life, and to heal. Friends, this is what, Isaiah had foretold, so long ago. Behold, this is our God. Do you remember, the words that we read, earlier? He will swallow up, death forever, and the Lord God, will wipe away, tears from all faces, and the reproach, of his people, he will take away, from all the earth.

For the Lord, has spoken, and it will be said, on that day, behold, this is our God. We have waited, for him, that he might save us. This is our Lord.

We have waited, for him. Let us be glad, and rejoice, in his salvation. Friends, what would it take, for God to give us, not just more human life, but eternal life?

[28 : 45] What would it take, for God, to do that for us, who in our sin, and rebellion against him, deserve, rightly, only death?

God can't just, wave his hand, and say, it's okay, it doesn't matter. He has to deal, with our sin, and the cause, of our death.

And so, this Jesus, as Luke tells this story, is looking ahead, he's looking ahead, to the day, that Jesus, would take death, upon himself, for us.

When Jesus, would walk, the hill, walk to the hill, of Calvary, and he would, allow himself, he would submit, to death itself, on our behalf.

He would offer himself up, and say, I will not, for your sake, let you die, I will offer myself, instead. And yet, this one, who offers himself, and takes on death, for us, does not stay there.

[29 : 49] But we know, that three days later, he rises, from the grave. And as we, in this Lenten season, hurdle towards Easter, we look forward, to the remembrance, that we can, know, that he did not, stay in the grave, he did not, simply die, but he rose.

And in, rising from the dead, he broke, the power of sin, and death, for all, who believe in him. He removed, the judgment, he took away, the stain of sin, and he gave us, instead, life, eternal.

The resurrected Jesus, speaks to us, the words, that he spoke, in John 11, I am the resurrection, and the life. He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, forever.

Though we will, most likely, face physical, death, that death, no longer, has power over us, because it is not, in Jesus, the last enemy, but it is, in fact, transformed, into the doorway, to eternity.

It is, in fact, the time, when we move, towards, the final, work of God, in this world. John the apostle, saw, in Revelation, behold, the dwelling place, of God, is with man, he will dwell, with them, and they will be, his people, and God himself, will be with them, as their God, he will wipe away, every tear, from their eyes, and death, shall be no more, neither, shall there be, mourning, nor crying, nor pain, anymore, for the former things, like death, have passed away, like death, isn't in there, I added it, the former things, have passed away, and he, he who is seated, on the throne, said behold, I am making, all things new, behold, this is our God, this is the God, that Luke, wants us to see, one who has authority, and in compassion, loves us, and longs, to give us, to free us, from the fear of death, so that we might live, life, so what difference, does this mean, what difference, does it mean, if we can say,

[32 : 18] Jesus lives, and by faith, so shall I, let's think about, what we started with, at the beginning, of our morning, knowing the Lord of life, makes us secure, what can man, do to me, we no longer, have to live, this life, seeking, seeking to, build monuments, for ourselves, so that we might be known, so that we might be assured, of our significance, so we might know, that we are loved, because in fact, Jesus has already, shown us, all of those things, and so death, is no longer, something that we're, afraid of, because it's the end, of when we can do that, but in fact, Jesus in the life, that he has given us, now frees us, to live this life, with great abandon, because we don't have, to do it for ourselves, and we don't have, to be insecure, but in fact, the security of knowing, the eternal life, in Jesus, allows us, to live a very full life, a life, of great stewardship, and, and of great hope, and great risk, and great faith, that God might use us, to do great things, for him, but not for our sake, not for our security, not, for our meaning in life, but for him, and for his glory, it frees us, to live in obscurity, if that's our calling, with joy, friends, knowing the Lord of life, also makes us patient, because if we know, that he is risen from the dead, and if we know, that we will be raised, with him on that last day, and we will enter, into that world, that picture, of what John gave us, if we know, that that is the fulfillment, we don't need to get it, all here, and so we can be patient, and so we can pursue, celibacy, and purity, in our sex lives, knowing that there is, an intimacy to come, with the Lord, that will outweigh, all of it, there is something better, than sex, in this world, well in eternity, and it's worth waiting for, it means that we don't have to, amass money, and influence, and security, and allow ourselves, to be driven, by our careers, in such a way, that we lose, the ability, to live life, for God, and for his glory, it frees us, to live with plenty, or with want, to do it for the glory, of God, and we no longer, have to amass power, to try to control, our relationships, and our circumstances, to control, our reputations, for the sake of others, but instead, because, we know that we have life, with him, and life eternal, instead, we can, follow his pattern, of living sacrificially, humbly, for the sake of others, to be a blessing, and to be a help, the hope, of the resurrection, gives us strength, for today, and hope, for tomorrow, in the face of despair, friends, in light of eternity, the greatest trial, you will face, and I don't say this lightly, is light, and momentary, the worst thing, that you think,

I can't endure this anymore, you can, when you see, eternity, that awaits you, when you think, life has no more meaning, and I can't go on, you can look to the one, who has, power over life, and

death, and know, he has given you, life and breath today, and if he has done that, then you can hold on, and you can live in hope, and you who, maybe are, feel powerless, before the little saviors, the little addictions, that you run to, for, for some kind of, hope in the midst, some, some kind of distraction, from the face of death, you can now look, death in the face, and say, you have no power, over me, death, where is your sting, death, where is your victory, and you can turn off the TV, and you can put down the bottle, you can throw out your video games, and you can worship God, for this is the end of the story, it's the crowds marveling, and wondering, at this God, who has come to save them, this is our hope as well, this is our calling, and our joy, that we who know, the Lord of life, might worship him, might be filled with joy, we've sung great songs, we're about to just sing, one more,

Jesus lives, and so shall I, but before we do that, let me quote, a hymn that, Nick, can we sing this in Easter, I won't, I won't tie you to it, but, lives again our glorious king, where oh death, is now thy sting, once he died, our souls to save, where thy victory, boasting grave, alleluia, so are we now, where Christ has led, following our exalted head, made like him, like him we rise, ours the cross, the grave, the skies, alleluia, hail the Lord of heaven and earth, praise to thee, by both be given, thee we greet triumphant now, hail the resurrection, thou, alleluia, let's pray, Lord I pray this morning, that we would, respond, to you,

Holy Spirit, turn our hearts, and worship, and praise, and adoration, right now, Lord help us, to see how much, we are controlled by death, and by the fear of it, and Lord will you free us, free us, by faith in the one, who holds the keys, to death, Lord, free us, by faith in him, to know that our life, is secure in him, and to live, rather out of, rather, instead of living in fear, Lord, to live in faith, and hope in him, we pray this in Jesus name, amen.

Amen.