

“Widow of Nain”

Luke 7:11-17

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INTRODUCTION:

Some of the strongest proof that Jesus is the Son of God comes from the miracles that are recorded in the four gospel accounts. We know that the miracles were usually witnessed by huge crowds of people, and in the Sunday morning adult Bible class over the past two weeks we have become familiar with Luke, a medical doctor who investigated the eyewitness reports and wrote down what he learned from his investigation. And those reports are truly amazing. Between the four gospel accounts, we read about Jesus healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, causing those who were paralyzed to walk again. We read about Jesus calming a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee, feeding thousands of people with just a few tiny scraps of food, and the miracles seem to go on and on. But some of the most impressive miracles include the three times when Jesus raised people from the dead.

And when we think about it, we realize that no one ever died in the presence of Jesus Christ. As the resurrection and the life, death fled from His presence. Most of us are familiar with the time when Jesus raised Jarius' daughter. He sent everyone out of the room except for His closest friends and the girl's parents, and then He said, ***“Little girl, I say to you get up!”*** And like one little girl I know, she woke up hungry, and the Lord ordered that someone should bring her some food.

We are also familiar with the raising of Lazarus. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were brothers and sisters and were all three good friends of Jesus. By the time Jesus got there, Lazarus was already dead. Jesus wept with the family, he asked to be taken to the grave, and then the Lord said, ***“Lazarus, come forth!”*** And at that point, Lazarus came back to life.

But sometimes we forget the first person that Jesus ever brought back from the dead, and this morning I'd like for us to remember by looking together at **Luke 7**, because in **Luke 7**, we find that Jesus resurrected the son of a widow from the village of Nain. The account takes place immediately after the healing of the centurion's servant in the city of Capernaum.

We know that the village of Nain was located about 6 miles southwest of Nazareth in Galilee. Jesus had just left the city of Capernaum and had walked roughly 25 miles to get to Nain, a village that is still in existence even today. Nain is in the hills, and those who have been there tell us that you can still see caves in the hillsides that were used for burials back in Bible times. We know from history that Nain was basically a tourist spot. The name means “pleasant,” and if you were going to Nain during the time of Christ, it was almost like saying you were going to the Wisconsin Dells today. It was a beautiful place.

But in the account we are about to look at this morning, we find that in the village of Nain the only son of a widow dies, the funeral procession is heading out of town on the way to the burial site just as Jesus and His people are arriving, and the Bible tells us that the two groups basically collide with one another.

This morning, I'd like for us to look at this collision and see what we can learn that might apply to our lives today. If you will, please look with me at **Luke 7**. ****PPT****

Luke 7:11-17

¹¹ Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. ¹² Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. ¹³ When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep." ¹⁴ And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" ¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. ¹⁶ Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!" ¹⁷ This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.

As we look back at these seven verses, we find that there were some powerful things going on—and certainly some powerful lessons for those of us who are gathered here this morning.

I. First of all, for example, we learn a lesson about THE POWER OF DEATH.
****PPT****

As we look back at **verse 12**, we find that there is a procession coming out of the city, and we find that it is a funeral procession. Certainly we expect funerals to be rather sad, but it seems that some are more sad than others. When a very old person passes away, we tend to almost expect it, because there are times when death is not a surprise. In fact, there are times when death is almost welcome—perhaps after many years of suffering and sickness.

But we find in this passage that the one who died (according to **verse 14**) was a "**young man.**" The Bible is silent concerning the cause of this young man's death, but we know that there are many reasons why even the young sometimes pass away. Sometimes the young are overcome with illness. Sometimes tragedy strikes in the form of a terrible accident or perhaps a natural disaster. Sometimes the young are murdered. Sometimes the young are subject to suicide. Sometimes the young are killed in war. We only need to look at the news over the past week or so (even here locally), and we see the young man from rural Lodi who died in an ATV accident. We see the young man who drowned while swimming down at Yellowstone Lake just southwest of here. When I was growing up, a friend of mine was killed by a drunk driver on her way home from the prom. Another friend was killed when the jack collapsed while he was working under his car—a senior in high school. The death of the young, therefore, is especially shocking because it is not natural.

Not only was this man young, but we find that he is survived by his mother. A mother was burying her only son. A parent should never need to bury a child. Again, it is not natural, we expect children to outlive their parents, we expect children to bury their parents, but life does not always happen as it should.

Not only was the dead person a young man, and not only was he his mother's only son, but we also find in **verse 12** that his mother was a widow. In other words, this woman had already lost her husband, and in the ancient world, a widow with no children was in a very vulnerable position. There were no government safety nets as we are blessed with having today. In that time and culture, widows had no legal rights and could not even accept an inheritance. And so this funeral was especially sad because this woman was left completely

on her own. As one commentary pointed out, **"The widow's tears were eloquent testimony of the lordship of death."** And we know what that writer was talking about. We know the power and the cruelty of death.

In a sense, all of us here this morning are in one huge funeral procession—from Abel who was murdered by his brother to the last person to ever die before the Lord returns—all of us in between are heading for the cemetery. **Hebrews 9:27** reminds us that, **"...it is appointed for [all people] to die once and after this comes judgment."** Once a human life is conceived, death becomes a power that none of us can avoid. We cannot stop it. We cannot buy our way out of it. We may not want to admit it, but this passage reminds us that death is a powerful force that all of us will need to face at some point in the future.

Wherever we go, we see funerals and cemeteries. One of our members has gone back home to Ghana for a month or so to get married, and I would imagine that people sometimes die—even in Ghana. Their customs may be different, but around the world death reigns. It comes for the rich and the poor, the healthy and the sick, the young and the old, and we find that all of us will die unless Christ returns before that time.

So first of all, we learn a lesson from the power of death.

II. **Secondly, we also learn a lesson from THE POWER OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST.** ****PPT****

In **verse 13**, the Bible says that, **"...when the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, 'Do not weep.'"** In **Isaiah 53**, the great prophet had written that the Messiah would be, **"...a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"** (**Isaiah 53:3**). In other words, the Son of God would understand the suffering that we as humans have to go through.

As far as I can tell, there are twelve places in the New Testament where the Bible says that Jesus felt compassion on someone. He felt compassion on those who were hungry, so he fed the 4,000 on that occasion. He felt compassion on the blind. He felt compassion on those with leprosy. And here we find that he felt compassion on the widow of Nain.

Our English word compassion comes from two Latin words meaning, to suffer together. In other words, when Jesus saw this woman, He suffered together with her. He could feel the pain that she was going through. In **Hebrews 4:15**, we are told that, **"...we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."**

Even though Jesus is the eternal Son of God, He is also the Son of Man. He knows what it means to be sad, and if we are ever tempted to think that God does not know what we are going through at the death of a friend, we need to go back and study what happened at the grave of Lazarus, where the Lord knew what He was about to do, but He wept with His friends. Jesus knows the pain of death, and He suffers together with us.

One thing we notice about the compassion of the Lord in **Luke 7** is that unlike what happened at the death of Lazarus, and unlike the healing of the centurion's servant in the first part of this chapter, the compassion of the Lord is not called for by the friends or family of those who suffered the loss. As far as we can tell, no one comes to Jesus for help. No one cries out for Jesus. No one asks Him to do anything, but He steps in based on pure compassion. He sees the suffering, and He suffers together with this woman who has lost her only son. One translation says that His heart went out to her.

Sometimes we may be tempted to think of God as being so high and holy and so far away that He hardly knows what's going on down here. But here we have a beautiful picture of the power of the love of God. As King David wrote in **Psalm 34:18**, "***The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.***" When we hurt, the Lord hurts together with us. His heart goes out to us. He saw suffering, and He reacted with compassion. What an amazing example for us to follow! But if we look very carefully, we find that the Lord did not stop with sympathy. And that leads us to our third concept this morning.

III. Not only do we see the power of death and the power of God's love, but we also see THE POWER OF LOVE IN ACTION. **PPT******

We see compassion being demonstrated, because according to **verse 14**, the Lord came up and touched the coffin and the procession came to a stop. Have you ever seen someone stop a funeral procession? Perhaps some of you have, but I have not. I have preached at a number of funerals, and a lot of times, I get to ride right up front in the lead car. A lot of times, there is a police escort, and on the larger funerals there are sometimes even police blocking the side streets, because in the states that I know of, a funeral procession has the right of way. Almost nothing stops a funeral procession, but the Son of God walks up to the procession, puts His hand on the casket, and the whole procession comes to a stop.

What we may not realize is that Jesus puts His reputation on the line here—there was no backing down from this point on, because according to Jewish law, anyone who touches a dead person was to be considered unclean. And so by reaching out, Jesus had thrown down the gauntlet. It was a showdown between Death and Jesus. And the part of the Godhead that had actually brought the Universe into existence was now standing there outside the city of Nain, and the one who took dust and created Adam now had his hand on the coffin of this widow's only son. At this point I need to point out that Jesus is about to be one of three others in the Bible who raised people from the dead. Elijah did it in **1 Kings 17**, Elisha did it in **2 Kings 4**, and Peter did it in **Acts 9**. But there is one major difference. The Bible clearly says that Elijah, Elisha, and Peter all prayed to the Lord before bringing people back from the dead. But what happens here in **Luke 7** is different—no prayer is offered, because as Jesus would later say about Himself, "***I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies...***" (**John 11:25**). Jesus simply says the word, and the Bible tells us that the young man sat up, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

And so we learn that when Jesus shows compassion—when He suffers with someone—it is not just a mental exercise, but He does something about it. And again, what an amazing example for us to follow!

The compassion of Jesus is compassionate enough to get involved. The love of God causes God to literally get His hands dirty. The love of God sees suffering and then does something about it. Obviously, we cannot literally follow His example—I mean, it would be great if we could comfort people by raising the dead—but there are certainly other things we can do. And the key here is that we can do something. The key here is that compassion is active. Jesus was moved with compassion...and then He did something about it.

Thankfully, Jesus did a lot more than bring a short-term solution to the problem of death. We remember the words from **Hebrews 2:14-15**, where the Bible refers to Jesus and says, "***Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also***

partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. Jesus conquered death through His own death on the cross, because as Paul wrote in **Romans 14:9**, ***"For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."*** Jesus is the Lord of both the dead and the living.

SUMMARY:

- This morning we have looked at the power of death—unless the Lord comes back first, all of us will die.
- We have studied the power of compassion—Jesus suffered with people—just as we can also do.
- And we have also seen the power in doing something about it—not only did Jesus feel with people, but He took steps to help them in their situation.

CONCLUSION: **PPT******

As we close, we need to notice what happened as a result of this miracle. According to **verse 16**, ***"Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and, 'God has visited His people!'"*** Every once in a while, we need a reminder that God has visited His people.

In **Luke 1:68**, as soon as John was born, his father's mouth was opened, and Zacharias said, ***"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people."*** The whole message of the New Testament, starting with the arrival of John the Baptist, is that God saw our need for forgiveness and sent His son to do something about it.

In response to our own salvation, those of us as Christians can now turn around and pass it on to others. We may have friends and loved ones struggling with a relationship. We can suffer with them and then offer to pray about it. We may have loved ones who are not yet saved. We can feel with them in that situation and then offer to explain the good news. We may know someone who is struggling with the death of a loved one. We can suffer with them and then try to help them through that situation. There are a thousand ways we can react to our compassion for the world around us. We can send a card, or teach a Bible class, or invite a friend, or even just listen patiently.

But the real question is what each of us will do with Jesus. In **John 5:28-29**, Jesus referred to a great day coming, when he said, ***"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment."*** There is a time coming when each of us here this morning will hear His voice from the grave. The question is: Will we have a resurrection of life or will we have a resurrection of judgment?

God has come to help His people, and every single one of us can be saved if we will accept the offer of salvation on His terms. We must turn away from sin. We must confess our belief that Jesus is the Son of God. We must then allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. If you are ready to make this commitment, we would invite you to let us know about it as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org

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