

Understanding Jesus
Jesus Ruins a Funeral
Luke 7:11-17

Today's passage is Luke 7:11–17. In this passage Luke describes a funeral like no other. As we'll see, Jesus ruined this funeral (in the most beautiful way possible). Listen as I read Luke 7:11-17.

11 Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. 12 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 a considerable crowd from the town was with her. 13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." 14 Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." 15 And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. 16 Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" 17 And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

My observation (and experience) is that the older you get the more you think about death and funerals. When I graduated from high school I think I had been to one or two funerals and I almost never thought about death. But now (like many of you) I have gone to dozens and dozens of funerals and I think about death quite a bit. One reason, of course, is that I conduct a fair number of funerals each year.

I have the privilege of walking with grieving families through the process of designing a funeral service that honors the loved one who has died, honors God, and invites everyone present to grieve well. At some point in every funeral, there's a time when one person or (sometimes) anyone who wants can share memories of the person. You typically hear touching stories, humorous stories, and inappropriate stories (that are sometimes also humorous).

I'm not embarrassed to admit that when I hear people share at funerals, I wonder, "What will they say about me?" Unless the world as we know it comes to an end first, you will die and people will come to your funeral. Do you wonder what they'll say about you? But infinitely more important than what other people will say/think about you is what God will think about you when you die. . . what God would say about you if he spoke at your funeral.

That may sound like an unanswerable question, but it's actually not. If you want to know what God thinks, notice what Jesus thinks because he is God in the flesh. If you want to know what God does, notice what his Son Jesus does. And so today we are going to notice what Jesus thinks and says and feels and does when he encounters a grieving widow. Luke's account in Luke 7:1-18 helps us understand Jesus' attitude toward death and funerals.

We read in verse 11 that soon after Jesus healed the centurion's son in Capernaum, he traveled to another town about 20 miles away.

11 Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him.

In verse 12 we learn that as he approached the city of Nain that he was met by another crowd, a funeral procession.

12 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 a considerable crowd from the town was with her.

The details that Luke gives us are significant. The man who had died is described as "the **only son** of his mother." The term Luke uses for "only" is found three times in his gospel. Each time it refers to an only child who has died or who is in danger of dying: here the widow's son had died; in chapter 8 Jarius' only daughter died and was brought back to life (8:41-42); in chapter 9 a man's only son was tormented by a demon that threw him into convulsions and slammed him to the ground (9:38-39). Just file away the idea that God had a habit of raising from the dead (or delivering) parents' "only child."

Luke also tells us that this only son's mother was a **widow**. Both the Old and New Testaments stress the importance of caring for widows in their distress. Jesus is certainly doing that here. Many would say that the deepest grief a person can experience in this life is the death of one of your children. This widow experienced that type of grief and anguish. As well, she would probably now face a very uncertain future financially and socially since it's likely that her son would have provided her primary income.

We are told Jesus' response beginning in verse 13:

13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

Jesus had compassion on this woman; his heart went out to her. Generally speaking, it's not a great idea to tell someone who is grieving the death of a close family member, "Do not weep." At my father's graveside service, a well-meaning friend saw me crying and said to me, "Don't cry. . . everything is going to be okay." He meant well, but it's a bad idea to stifle your grief and emotions. Tears are a gift from God.

Jesus wasn't telling this woman to suppress her emotions; as a matter of fact, Jesus himself wept when his friend Lazarus had died. By saying, "Do not weep," Jesus was subtly telling her that her reason for weeping would soon be gone.

Unlike other miracles, where Jesus healed in response to a request made in faith, **Jesus unilaterally decided to act**. His compassion for this woman compelled him to act.

14 Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."

The bier was basically a stretcher on which they carried the body to the place it was buried. Jesus didn't have to, but he touched the bier. The Law stipulated that if you touched a dead body you became unclean for seven days (Num. 19:11). But that apparently didn't apply to Jesus. When Jesus touched someone who was ritually defiled (a dead person or a someone with leprosy), he wasn't defiled; they were made whole.

Just as Jesus spoke a word and cast out a demon or healed someone who was sick, Jesus spoke to the dead man. "Young man, I say to you, arise." No incantations or fanfare, just a command.

15 And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

We'd love to know what the man said when he came back to life, right? But what he said wasn't the point; the point is that he was alive (dead people can't sit up and speak). The comment that "Jesus gave him to his mother" reminds us that Jesus was addressing this widow's grief. She no longer had a reason to weep.

Notice the response of the two crowds and the disciples that had witnessed Jesus raising a man from the dead:

16 Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"

"Fear seized them all. . ." Fear is an appropriate response when you're in the presence of someone who is that **powerful**. If Jesus could bring dead people back to life (see also Luke 8:37), what else can he do?!?! The short answer, of course, is "Anything!" He is just that powerful.

As well, they "glorified God" by making a couple of statements about Jesus, **statements that were much truer than they realized**. First, they said, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" Prophets typically brought a message from God and occasionally did miracles. It may be that they were thinking specifically of the prophet Elijah because this miracle is strikingly similar to a miracle that Elijah performed (1 Kings 17:17-24). In that case, Elijah the prophet brought back to life the only son of a widow and "delivered him to his mother." There was one striking difference between the miracle of Elijah and the miracle of Jesus. Whereas Elijah "stretched himself out" on the boy's body three times and cried out to God to bring him back to life, Jesus simply spoke.

Like Elijah, Jesus was definitely a prophet. But Jesus was THE prophet that God had promised to send (see Deuteronomy 18:15, Acts 3:22-23, 7:37). His words would be God's words; whether or not you listened to him would determine your eternal destiny.

Second, they said, “God has visited his people!” Whenever a prophet or an angel appeared to people, it was true that God had “visited” someone (see 1:68, 78). But Jesus wasn’t merely a human who represented God; he was actually God in a flesh and blood body. In the gospel of Luke, when God “visited his people” he wasn’t merely stopping by to say hello; he was entering human history to redeem his people once and for all. Here the people acknowledged that God had visited his people, but in chapter 19 we read that Jesus wept over Jerusalem because they *didn’t* recognize the “the time of [God’s] visitation”; they didn’t understand that he was God in the flesh.

Even though they had a limited understanding of who Jesus was, the people had spoken truth: Jesus was a prophet and God had visited his people. Not surprisingly, therefore, we read in verse 17:

17 And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

Jesus’ reputation grew and swelled in and around Jerusalem (where Jesus would go to be crucified).

What does this passage teach us about Jesus’ attitude toward death and funerals? Very simply, it tells us that ***Jesus has both the compassion and the power to raise the dead***. Jesus demonstrated his great compassion and his power over death when he brought the widow’s only son back to life with a command.

Why does this one account of a young man being raised from the dead matter to us? It matters because of how this account fits into the larger plot of the book of Luke (all the gospels, really). The basic plot of the gospel of Luke is that ***Jesus is God’s only Son who died and was raised from the dead***. And it turns out that both the Son’s death and resurrection are expressions of God’s compassion and power. The most famous expression of this truth is found in John 3:16.

16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

We see the love/compassion of God, don’t we? He so loved the world - not just the Jewish people, but everybody in the world - that he ***gave*** “his only Son” (KJV - “only begotten Son” - not the best translation; better is “one and only Son” or “unique Son”; see Hebrews 11:17-19). The Father took the initiative to send his unique Son Jesus; and his Son willingly went to the cross to pay for our sins. By his great power he raised his only Son from the dead on the third day.

God did this “that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Sin is the fundamental problem with humanity; we all sin by nature and by choice. Because of our sin we are spiritually dead. And we cannot do a single thing to get rid of our sin; we can’t work it off or pay it off. . . it has to be forgiven by the One we’ve sinned against. That’s exactly what God does for “whoever believes in him/Jesus.” Consequently, you

don't perish (i.e., experience eternal death); you have eternal life - life which begins here and now in this life and just keeps getting better through all eternity.

It turns out that **God has both the compassion and the power to raise YOU from the dead**. He raises you from the dead spiritually when you believe; and he will raise you bodily from the dead when Christ returns.

Believing in him and having eternal life changes the way you think about your **death** and your **funeral**.

Your death. You **die** when your body stops working. But Jesus said (John 11) that if you believe in him, you live even if you die. That's because when your body dies your spirit goes directly into the presence of the Lord. That's why Paul could say in Philippians 1, "for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." His entire life was devoted to knowing Christ and making him known. But his death marked the transition from life on earth to life in heaven with God.

Your funeral. Those who attend your funeral will still grieve because death is an enemy that separates us from the people we love. But if the people at your funeral are clued in to the things we're talking about this morning, they "will not grieve as those who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). They will grieve in light of God's great compassion and power. . . and his commitment to raise his people from the dead.

At your funeral people will share touching stories, humorous stories, and perhaps inappropriate stories . . . but the thing that will bring them the most comfort and joy will be the knowledge that you are now "at home with the Lord." Because they have seen your faith in Christ and your love for God, they do not grieve as those who have no hope. They celebrate your eternal life.

Your graveside service. And then (usually) they will gather at your grave and commit your body to the ground. And someone will read a passage of Scripture (1 Corinthians 15 or Romans 8 or 1 Thessalonians 4) which reminds people that when Christ returns "the dead in Christ will be raised immortal." Our tired, broken, diseased, worn out bodies will be transformed into the likeness of Jesus' resurrected body. Perhaps they will read Philippians 3:20–21 which says:

20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

This is what God does; he raises people from the dead. **God has both the compassion and the power to raise you from the dead**. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and that will be your experience.