

## Luke 7:11-17 June 9, 2013

*11 Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. 12 As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." 14 Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" 15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. 16 They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." 17 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.*

[Let's set the scene:] There is a long standing custom when you meet up with a funeral procession headed for the cemetery. People pull to the side of the road & get out of the way. It seems appropriate. It's the least we can do – and about all we can do, because there is really nothing we can do about their grief. We can't take the cause of their sadness away. We can't bring back their loved one. So... let's respectfully get out of the way, so they can get to the graveside to say their goodbyes.

I see the scene of Luke 7:11-17 form in my mind. There is the funeral procession walking down the road that leads out of the town of Nain. They're carrying the body of a young man, struck down in the prime of his life. Dead.

[Let's talk the deeper reality:] If you want to get through to someone that he or she has sin, and they're offering denial of one sort or another, maybe ask them if they are going to die someday. The un-separable dots that the Bible connects are: "Death came to all people, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Holiness is what God requires for eternal life.

What about me? Am I holy? When I look back on my life ~ I see all the times I've cared more about self than others. I have lied to get out of trouble, I've been envious of others and gladly gossiped to make myself look better; I have been greedy. I definitely have not been holy. The Bible tells us no one can make the leap up to perfection - all fall short of God's holiness.

Do you have the power to get out of the cesspool of your sin and the pit of eternal death that it ends in? No.

We would remain in the pit of hell ... if left to ourselves and our own plans.

"Death came to all people, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Those dots, always connected, are placed very visibly before each of us. The grim reminders of sin's curse have most poignantly grabbed my attention when the casket has contained my grandfathers, grandmother, my wife's mother & our children's grandmother. ...when I led the memorial service for John, one of our church family in Utah, a man in his 40s, with a son and daughter still at home. At those times, so many other things in life seem to get "suffocated" right out of the picture - attention is not easily diverted from the reality. This is death. This is my loved one dead. I see the reminder: "Death came to all people, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

And that's where we'd remain stuck, if it wasn't for a man named Jesus:

So let's take a closer look again at Luke's God-given account of the events of this day, recorded for us in Luke ch.7.

There is a group of people walking toward the town of Nain, on the same road the young man is being carried out. One might expect that the etiquette / manners of the people of that day would have led them to move aside, for the funeral procession to make its way unhindered to the burial site. But here's where the scene this day diverges from what we humans ordinarily do...

Jesus didn't step aside to let this funeral procession pass by. Jesus makes them stop. Unlike us, who step aside unable to do anything to end the grief of those who lost a loved one, Jesus does something – right there, right then. And what do we learn?

Listen to the first words out of Jesus' mouth at the scene. We get a view into his heart – we see how he felt inside at the close-up sight of this funeral procession. What do we learn about God in the flesh?

- “compassion” – his heart went out to her. Deep feelings welled up, churning up his guts. Jesus says, “don't cry.”
- Jesus, without even being asked, steps up to help this widowed, now childless woman, who lost everyone closest to her.

The next words out of Jesus' mouth back up his compassion with the power to turn everyone around, reversing the funeral procession by undoing the cause of their sadness this day.

Jesus just says the Word, “Get up” ... and right up the young man gets (vs.15). Those are two things that don't normally go together: “dead man” and “sat up”!

- What does this show about Jesus?
- What does this point us ahead to in Jesus' life?
- And ... what do the answers to those two questions mean for me, as a believer in Jesus?

Think of those questions as the kids come forward. We'll begin to answer these 3 questions as the kids are in front here for part of our message today.

[Kid's lesson: the way out of the pit of sin & death ideas taken from a Blue Fish TV clip, adapted to use a Legos for object lesson...]

Imagine this is a real man who fell into a pit. He tries getting out, but there is no hope of that.

- A traveler comes along and speaks down to him. He told the man to meditate – to sit on the ground and purify his mind, and when he reached a clear enough state, all suffering would cease. But after the man did this, he still remained at the bottom of the pit.
- Another man came along to the top of the pit. He explained: the hole doesn't really exist, and neither do you. It is all an illusion. But the man at the bottom of the hole who was told he didn't exist was still stuck in the hole, which still surrounded him.
- Another visitor called down, suggesting the man perform good deeds & pray 5 times a day, and perhaps one day the divine would set him free because of his efforts. The man prayed the best he could and did all the good he could. But the man found after all his efforts that he was still in the pit, now completely exhausted from trying to get himself out.

Another man appeared. There was something different this time. He saw the man hopelessly stuck. And he didn't tell the man in the hole to do anything to try to get himself free. This man lowered himself down into the pit (by a rope). He took hold of the man, and lifted him up, carrying him out to light and safety. The man in the hole, who couldn't get himself out, was saved. Now let me show that the rope is tied off to a cross, as a reminder: Jesus came down to live

and die and rise back to life, in order to rescue us from the pit of our sin and death. All who trust in him are given eternal life. That's the only way. [Kids return to seats.]

Now, physical death is still a certainty to which we all, young and old alike, must look ahead. It is approaching. What a joy to... this morning look at an impasse where someone in the grip of death meets up with the Lord of Life. And, when the Lord of Life graciously intervenes with his power, death must uncurl its clutches and release the individual.

What is the comfort for us, as ones who place our trust in Jesus, especially as we look to what is ahead in our lives?

- If Jesus has the power over death, as he proves here at the gate to Nain, then when he promises to raise us from death on the last day, he has the power to do that very thing. And that life, he promises, will last forever. "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command... and the dead in Christ will rise... and we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thes. 5, 1 Cor. 15, and others).
- On the last day, Jesus will descend from on high, and lead the procession back to this earth with its graves scattered across the face of it. He will meet death and the grave head on. And when he says, "Come out!", we will... to life eternal in Jesus.

Until that day... What about the times when we face loss, sadness, hardship? Look back to Jesus' Word of compassion to this mother in Luke ch. 7. He speaks words of Compassion to us too:

- Psalm 68:5 ... "His name is the Lord... a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling."
- Psalm 72:12; 140:12 "The Lord upholds the cause of the needy." "He will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death."
- He promises to shepherd us, his people, with a gentle touch, and even carry us when he knows that's best.
- (Isaiah 54) – "My unfailing love for you will not be shaken..." declares the Lord who has compassion on you.

We've focused on Jesus' words spoken this day – the two words spoke this day outside Nain – words of compassion and power. But I don't want to leave the scene without noting the response of the people. People glorified God. They declared: 1) a great prophet has arisen among us; 2) God has come to help his people. Indeed, more than just one of the prophets, this is God himself, Immanuel, God with us, the Word made flesh.

When our tears are dried by seeing the truth of our Lord Jesus' command over death and compassion for us.... How can we not but help to give glory and thanks to God in our lives!

[Let's wrap up today's message:] I mentioned the trip to the graveside in opening this morning. Come back to "goodbyes" spoken at the graveside. You know the origin of our word "goodbye?" It is a shortened version of saying: "God be with you ("ye" in old English)." And we like to add to that "God be with you... till we meet again." We stand confidently staring death in the face saying to one another: "God be with you till we meet again... we will meet again, and on that day the tears of this day will be gone."

Seeing Jesus' feelings on this day, recorded in Luke ch. 7, helps us to understand when we see and feel raw, gut-churning emotions at the close-up sight of death. But we aren't left hopeless, or empty at such moments. For seeing Jesus' actions on this day, and his command over death, confirms for us our confidence in him is correctly placed. To him be glory forever and ever amen!