

Jesus the Compassionate
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(READ Luke 7:11-17)

Last week, when we began this new section starting in chapter 7, I mentioned how Luke wants to prove that Jesus is indeed the fulfillment of the OT promises of God. He's told us those things earlier when Jesus was born and he also told us this through the teaching of Jesus himself in Luke 4. But in chapter 7 Luke shows us this reality; he proves it by telling us stories of the power, authority and compassion of Jesus. Real stories with real people.

Flip back to chapter 1 and notice how Zechariah interprets the events taking place with the coming birth of John the Baptist; vs. 68-69 (READ). Now, look what's said in vs. 16 (READ). Likewise in Luke 4:18 Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor." Whose poorer than a widow who loses her only son? Luke is trying to help us connect the dots. We're supposed to look at say, "Wow! Jesus is the one. Look what's he's doing. God said one day these things would happen; this must be the time!"

So again, read and hear these words in Luke 7 as support and encouragement to help you believe that Jesus truly is the Savior promised by God. Our hope and trust in Jesus is meant to deepen as we hear these stories.

Last week, Jesus was displayed as good by welcoming and accepting the one you'd least expect. Rather than praising the know-it-all Jewish leaders as an example of faith, Jesus flips the spotlight around and shines it on a foreigner. He's the one with faith; he's the example that Israel should follow. Why? Because he was humble. He wasn't presumptuous. He didn't look at himself in the mirror and think, "Why wouldn't God love me." He said, "No, I'm unworthy, Jesus. But I'm still desperate; will you help me?" What a remarkable thing; God has quick, lavish help for those who humbly ask for help and he's got nothing for those who are proud.

Our passage today is a little different. Now, the question is this: Will Jesus help the poor? Will he be kind to the one who has nothing? The centurion was afraid of losing his favorite servant; he probably had dozen more. But what if you're at risk of losing everything? What if you don't have 12 servants, but only a son? And what if you've already lost him? What if you're completely alone? Now what are you going to do? Will Jesus do anything about this? Let's look at the story.

Nain is south and west of Capernaum. It's a little town; not a city. And the crowd has changed. Now, rather than great crowds following Jesus, he's being tracked by his disciples. When he enters Nain he bumps into a funeral procession. A mother is grieving her son; a crowd is with her most likely joining this mother in her grief; it was probably a close community. But that's today; tomorrow the crowd will be gone doing their own thing and she will be alone.

You might think the point of this story is the miraculous healing power of Jesus. I mean, look what happens. A young man dead on his way to be buried is brought back from the dead. I mean, come on! That's going to make the evening news. But that's not the big idea. The focus of the story is on the compassion of Jesus for the mother. She's the focal point of Jesus' ministry. Look at vs. 12-14; the crowd was with *her*, Jesus saw *her*, he had compassion on *her*, he spoke and comforted *her*. In vs. 15 it says that Jesus gave him back to *her*. Even the way the man is described is in relation to *her* (look at vs. 12... the only son of his *mother*). She's the object of Jesus' compassion. Why is Jesus so captivated by this mother?

This woman is the poorest of the poor. Jump back to chapter 6. Look at what vs.. 20-21 (READ). That's this woman. She's without a husband or son to take care of her. She's grieving her loss. This is who Jesus has come for. The good news is for her. Luke is compiling all of this information showing us again and again what Jesus has come to do... and for whom. Let's talk more about this.

You know, when someone we love or care for dies, there's obviously the shock and pain of the loss in the moment and even for years to come. But that's not all. There's another question that we experience when someone we love dies. The best way I can describe that is with this question: "What now? What are we going to do now?" My father died of cancer; he had it for 10 years. My mother will tell you that the day she heard the doctor tell dad, "You have cancer," she began preparing for his death. At that moment, there was this, "What am I going to do?" feeling. But even after all of the preparation my parents did together, after all of the planning, making sure mom knew where the money was and who to call for the life insurance and where to go with the tax documents, there was still a sense of not being ready and prepared. I remember the weekend Dad died being at home and helping mom sort things out; I asked her, "Well, where's the such and such document (I can't remember what we were looking for)?" She says, "It's in the safe." "What's the combination." Mom looks at me... "I don't know." You just can't cover everything, can you? Two hours later after digging in a number of nooks and crannies Mom found Dad's secret spot.

I know that's not a huge deal; I'm sure we could have called a locksmith the next day. But it illustrates that feeling, "What are we going to do now?" This woman was a widow. In the 1st century, not having a husband to provide was bad news. Her safety net wasn't social security or a big, fat life insurance payout. There were no governmental programs. Her husband was her safety net. God had a mechanism for this need outlined in the OT, but God's people didn't always want to obey. Thankfully, God gave this woman a son. If Dad couldn't provide, the son most certainly would. But now he's gone, too. The text doesn't say how old the son was. Vs. 12 says "a man who had died was being carried out." But Jesus calls him "Young man" in vs. 14. It seems that he was fairly young (he doesn't have a wife apparently), yet old enough, maybe, to work and provide for he and his mother. We don't really know. Either way, this woman is in a bad place. Who's going to take care of her now?

Have you ever been in a “What now?” situation? Where you truly felt poor? Poor, meaning, you’ve pretty much exhausted all the possible solutions you can imagine. You’ve run out of resources; you don’t have any more ideas. And maybe even worse, you’re under the gun. Time is of the essence. I admit that I really have never felt that way before; that’s not been my reality or experience.

Feeling, knowing, experiencing your poverty is hard, but it’s not necessarily bad. Poverty teaches us about our need for God. I know that might sound odd; poverty being good for us. It’s not always; Proverbs says poverty is a temptation to sin. But remember what Jesus said back in chapter 6 (vs. 20b) “Bless are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” Also, (21b) “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.” If that’s true, then there’s a way that poverty and grief help us. I’d need more time to dig into the details of this; when is poverty and grief good? In what context is it bad? And I don’t say these things glibly; like, “Bring on the pain! I need more suffering!” I’m trying to be really sober about this knowing some of you have come to the “What now?” point in life. So, while this woman is in a desperate poor place, God has something for her. And he has something for you, too, in your poverty.

What does Luke want us to see in this passage? The critical verses are vs. 13-14 (READ). It’s Jesus and his compassion. He empathized with this woman; he spoke words of hope to comfort to her. And he met her need. She restores the life of her son and gives her what she needs.

I can say with complete and utter confidence that God has compassion on your poverty and pain, too. In Matthew 20 Jesus healed two blind men because vs. 34 says he had pity and compassion on them. When the crowds were hungry in Mark 6 we are told that Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus is moved by your need. I don’t what that is for you. For some of you it might be chronic pain; your back, your MS, your Parkinson’s is a constant challenge and you are tired of it all. Maybe you have some pretty significant relational challenges; you’re trying to figure out what to do to find peace with someone in your life. Maybe it’s financial. Maybe someone you love and depended on has died. Maybe depression has rocked your world and your tears have been your food all night long. Whatever it might be, Jesus has compassion for you when you come to the end of your resources and have no way out. Can I give you some biblical advice and encouragement to keep taking steps of faith in the face of your poverty?

First of all, believe this. Believe this is who Jesus is. Believe that he is compassionate and that he has compassion for you. I’m guessing if you’re struggling today in pain and poverty you feel forgotten and forsaken. I get it. That’s a pretty normal feeling; you’re not alone. So, you have to ask yourself: what am I going to believe? Am I going to believe the word of God or am I going to believe how I feel? What’s a more reliable source of truth? The scriptures or my feelings? Tell yourself today, “God’s word is more reliable.” I can trust God’s word more than I can trust how I feel. See the compassion of Jesus in the word and believe it.

Secondly, learn how to lament your pain to God while you wait for comfort. Learn how to cry out to God in distress. I've recently exposed some of my boys to Bono and the crew...U2. They have a song that's based on Psalm 40 - the title of the song is simply "40". "I waited patiently for the Lord / He inclined and heard my cry / He brought me up out of the pit / Out of the miry clay." That's straight from Psalm 40. The chorus to song says, "How long to sing this song?" Did you know there are 20 instances in the psalms where the author cries, "God, how long?" How long will my enemies taunt me? How long will you be angry? God, how long? Do you think he's trying to figure out the minutes? Do you think he's asking the question because he's trying to make some calculations? No, he's just crying out, "God, how long? When will it stop?" It's raw expression of emotion. The psalms give us an example of faith; we should mimic its example. Learn from the psalms how to express your pain and hurt to God. When you stay engaged with God in your pain, when you face him with your honest cries for help, your faith is as real and true as it gets.

Finally, don't pigeonhole God's help. Because God is compassionate he will act on my behalf. But don't predetermine how God must or will meet you with compassion. We don't get the sense that this mother in Luke 7 had any expectation that Jesus would help her. Remember, he initiated the help. But my guess is she didn't expect her son to come back to life. Could have she, would have she predicted that's what Jesus would do? No way!. Look at vs. 16, "Fear seized them all." I'm usually not startled by things I expect to see happen; something radically unexpected makes me afraid.

Friends, would you trust God in such a way that you're willing to let God surprise you with his compassion and care? That's trust and faith in God. Telling God how he must come through for you is your way of trying to remain in control. It's saying to God, "You're only good if you do what I tell you to do." Who's god now? Believe, my brothers and sisters, what God has planned for you is far better than what you can manufacture for yourself.

That's the picture of Jesus; a compassionate God with all the power in the world to meet you in your pain. Call out to him and he will hear.

Key verse: Luke 7:13-14 ~ And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and 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.'

Questions for the week

- Have you ever had any "What am I going to do?" moments in life? Did God feel close or far?
- How does learning/knowing Jesus has compassion for you change your hope and trust in him?
- What can you do to be an agent of compassion towards others in the name of Jesus?