

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Luke 7:11-17
Sermon Title: "Jesus' Compassion and Life for Us"

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA
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{SLIDE 1} The story we just read is a little known story. Luke's Gospel is the only one that tells it. The other Gospels failed to spend the time mentioning it. The story is so unfamiliar to us that even I used to think that a daughter died in the town of Nain and not a son. Then I realized that I was getting it mixed up with the story in Luke 8 about the daughter of Jairus who died. She was twelve-years-old when it happened, and that is the same amount of years that a woman suffered from bleeding, and she touched the hem of Jesus' robe, and she was instantly healed.¹

Our story today takes place in the little town of Nain, 25 miles southwest of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. The name Nain in English means "green pasture" and "lovely."² Jesus is going into the town. The 12 disciples are following him. Many other disciples are following him. A large crowd of people are tagging along. This is where our story begins.

¹ Cf. Luke 8:40-56.

² <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/nain/>.

{SLIDE 2} But before we tell any more of the story, let us look at a few words that should jump out at us. The first would be *widow*. Verse 12 tells us that she is a mother with only one son remaining, but rest tells us that she is a widow. That is important, because she could be a mother who has lost her child and she could still be married. But she isn't married. She has buried her husband, and now she is about to bury her son. She is all alone.

Deuteronomy 24:17 says, "Do not pervert judgement against the stranger or the fatherless, and do not take the widow's garment as a deposit." Jeremiah 22:3 says, "Thus says the Lord, 'Execute judgment and righteousness and deliver the spoils out of the hand of the oppressor, and do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow...'" These are just a few verses that talk about the widow, as well as the stranger and fatherless. Do you know why the widow is mentioned? Because widows could be easily abused.

"The status of a widow in ancient Israelite society was precarious."³ She had no inheritance rights, so when her husband died nothing went to her. If she has nothing, she has no means to buy food or

³ *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, Paul J. Achtemeier (General Editor), 1132.

clothing. She has no home, and so she would have to wonder about trying to find shelter. Widows were mistreated. They were looked down upon and viewed as sinful for some strange reason.

Now, if the widow has a son still living, she could find protection under his roof. The son would have received the father's inheritance, and he could welcome in his mother and give her everything she needed until the last days of her life. We can assume that this was the case for the widow in our story today. Her son was alive and cared for her every need. She had nothing to worry about. Nobody could mistreat her or abuse her.

And yet, in our story the widow outlasts her son. This is highly unnatural. She has nobody to care for her anymore. Her status in the town has now taken a drastic downturn. Everybody will mourn for her and feel sorry for her great loss, but not many people will help her find food and clothing and shelter. She will have to wonder the street, being mistreated, being viewed as a great sinner.

{SLIDE 3} The next word that should jump out at us is *compassion*. We find it in verse 13. Who has compassion in the story? A couple people do. We go

back to verse 12, and we see that the young son is being carried out of the town. People show compassion to the dead man and to his grieving mother by carrying the body to the outside of town. They may be the ones who will bury the body. In verse 13 we discover that the widow is weeping, which she ought to. She would be in a terrible state, so some women might be surrounding her as they walk outside the town to the graveyard. They show compassion to her by helping her walk, just in case her strength leaves her. She may be incredibly weak at the moment, because she know that her life has ended. Only homelessness and poverty await her.

Sadly, though, the compassion of these people who surround the widow and carry her son's body is limited. The funeral procession would be led by professional mourners who would play flutes and cymbals and make a frenzy over the dead person.⁴ Once the body was in the ground, their job was complete and they would go off to do what they normally do. So those in the funeral procession would show some sort of compassion but is was staged and limited. The women crying with the widow may also be a part of the funeral procession "performers." They

⁴ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, cf. 85.

might also be woman of the town of Nain who have husbands and children already alive. They would help the widow to the gravesite and back home, but over the weeks they would have their own families to care for. Their compassion would be limited as well.

{SLIDE 4} Jesus, however, looks at the moment and then he looks beyond the moment. He doesn't just take care of the here and now but also the future and the soon to be. When the professional mourners and women of the village have disappeared, what would be left is a miserable person. The widow has lost her husband. She has lost her child, which no person should ever have to experience. The pain of those death would linger in her abject poverty. The pain would follow her to the miserable streets, where there is no food or shelter or love. Jesus sees all of this. Nobody else does – or nobody else cares – but Jesus see what this is what awaits the woman if something is not done to reverse her situation. He will have compassion for this desperate widow in the here and now and for her future.

{SLIDE 5} This is what Jesus does for us. His compassion doesn't last a moment. His compassion doesn't last until everything is okay. Jesus' compassion lasts and lasts and lasts. Luke makes

sure that we know that Jesus has compassion for the widow.⁵ He feels it in the depth of his heart.⁶ He feels her sadness and total loss. He is moved to pity her entire condition. And he is moved to do something about it. He is moved to change her life in such ways that she no longer suffers. She no longer cries and feels lost. She is no longer alone, but is cared for for the rest of her days.

Jesus has the same compassion for us. His compassion is not limited – his compassion is eternal. It is bottomless- it never loses its enormity. Jesus not only knows what we go through now, but he knows where the situation is going to take us if it persists. Jesus knows our present state and our future condition, and he will love us at both times. He will be moved to his core to feel our loss or pain or frustration or anger and whatever stresses us. He is moved to do something about it. He is moved to change our lives in such ways that we no longer suffer. We no longer cry and feel lost. We are no longer alone, but are cared for in this life and the next.

{SLIDE 6} The last words, which are actually the last two words, that should jump out at us is *dead*

⁵ Cf. Luke 7:13.

⁶ Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, cf. 87-88.

and *alive*. In verse 12 the only son of a widow is dead. He is leaving his town as a corpse. But in verse 15 he was a dead man, but he is now sitting up. Dead things do not sit up unless they have been given life again, unless Someone has revitalized them.

{SLIDE 7} One of the first things I learned back in college, when I first accept Christ as Savior, is that Jesus didn't come into the world to make bad people good. This was not his mission, because if you think about somebody can be good but still sinful. They can do nice things most of the time, but they do not know who Christ is. They may even reject that Jesus or God makes a difference in their lives. No, Jesus' mission was not to make bad people good; he came to make dead people alive. We are dead without God. We are non-existent without faith in Jesus Christ. God knew this; God knows this. We could be born with all the best virtues a person could have, but if we do not have Jesus raising us from the dead the best virtues are meaningless.

{SLIDE 8} There was a Christian concert I went to years ago, and they played a video in which a person was listening to the word of God but not accepting it. A girl was trying to get him to believe, imploring him to believe, because it was a matter of life and

death. He wouldn't do it... at first. But then he went to church. He read his Bible. He prayed and attended a Life Group and served God in some sort of ministry.

All of a sudden, the young man wakes up and sees himself in a coffin. The coffin just barely fits him, and so he becomes overcome with fear. Claustrophobia overwhelms him and he can hardly breathe. The experience doesn't last long, because he hears banging outside. The wood of the coffin splinters into pieces, and he finds staring down at him the girl who had been telling him about Jesus. She tells him to get up and get out of his personal coffin. The two hug and celebrate his escape from death, but then he realizes that more closed coffins surround them. There are others who are dead who must become alive. They don't know about Christ - they, too need to hear and believe. The girl looks him seriously in the eyes and says, "OK, you and I got work to do."

{SLIDE 9} Jesus touches the coffin of the dead son. He tells the man to rise. Have life. He doesn't call the son from badness to goodness. Jesus calls him from death to life. He literally has new life in Jesus Christ. The widow has new life in Jesus as well. She no longer wear the title of *widow*. She wears the titles of *restored* and *revitalized*. And then all who witnessed

this great miracle may also be turned from being dead to being alive. All those who whoop and holler in verses 16 and 17, all those who are afraid and who proclaim God has shown his favor: they all can be made alive in Christ. They can accept the miracle, and understand that life may come to them, just as it did to a son and his mother.

We are dead without God, yes. But we are alive with God in Christ and the Holy Spirit. We exist with faith in Jesus Christ. All the best virtues are made alive, and we may use those virtues for the kingdom of God. “Rise” the command comes to us. “Sit up, stand up, be made alive.” Jesus is the One who has the power to reverse death. Jesus is the One to make resurrection a reality in our lives. He promises to restore to life all that he touches.⁷ Feel that touch, and live.

⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*, cf. 208.

Assurance of Pardon

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” Friends, believe the good news: In Christ you and I are forgiven. Thanks be to God.