

Title: When the Lord saw her  
Text: Luke 7.11-17  
Theme: The compassionate power of God  
Series: Luke  
Prop Stmtnt: Christ loves to exercise his power for the pure goodness of others.

The Bible has 2 parts: the OT and the NT. The OT is the largest section and it focuses on how much this world needs a perfect king. But as much as we need a perfect king, when this perfect king came to us, our world rejected him. That is the story of the first 4 books of the NT. Jesus was and is controversial, but not because there was anything wrong with him. Simply put: we are idiots who don't know what is good for us. We have been studying the book of Luke which is the story of the life of Christ as recorded by a 1<sup>st</sup> century, Gentile doctor, who wrote this book and the book of Acts in order to provide understanding and certainty for the newly emerging Christian faith. In 1.3-4 Luke gives us his purpose statement for this account: *"...it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, **THAT** you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."* Luke conducted a detailed study, like unto a dissertation for a PhD and then organized his findings in order to make this case. Part of his motivation may have been to see if what he heard being claimed was indeed true, but as he states, what became his ultimate motivation was to provide certainty to a man named Theophilus, which could have been the man's real name, or a nickname of a guy (God-lover) or a term for all God-lovers. By telling us his stated purpose we can read these accounts knowing why Luke chose to include them. If you are a God-lover, if you are genuine follower of Christ, the gospel of Luke provides ballast in your boat, depth in your soul, confidence in your heart, certainty in your thinking and purpose in your life. It is so reassuring in such a lost and dark world. If you are not yet a follower of Christ, then this account is good for you to examine in order to see if the claims of Christianity make sense. Is this true and is this compelling?

Genuine Christianity is both true and it is designed to be compelling. C.S. Lewis famously said that he was "the most reluctant convert." But he did not mean that he was forced to believe and he hated it. No. In his study of Christ and Christianity, all of his arguments for unbelief were taken away and he was left with no other choice than to believe and to love the One he believed in. That's the point. If you are not yet a believer in Christ, Luke is not trying to force you to believe by rubbing your nose in it. There is no sweet fellowship in that. I am very much looking forward to this college football season because for the last 3 years, that team from Ann Arbor has beaten my beloved Buckeyes. I have to admit that my team has lost. As you know I hate saying that and admitting that. I have had to concede that the team from Ann Arbor has been better. But my painful and humiliating concession does not generate love for the maize and blue. Au contraire! Luke is not proving a point so that you have to admit what you hate. He is trying to lay out the evidence for you, so that you can know the truth and love the One who is the truth. That goal is accomplished beautifully in our text.

You can see and admire the Hope Diamond at the Smithsonian in Washington D.C. This stone, with an estimated worth of \$200-\$250 million is displayed in a way that the observer can see

the brilliance and beauty of this storied gem. In a way, that is what Luke is doing. Each account is a brilliant and beautiful display of Christ, the Son of God, so that you will see with amazement, understand with certainty and love with faith.

Read Text:

1. **God's Timing is intentional and perfect.** (11-12)

“Soon afterward” Luke says, perhaps even the next day Jesus went to a town called Nain. Up until this point, Jesus has performed some serious miracles and has preached some serious sermons. He has cast out demons, healed a paralytic, cleansed a leper, healed a man with a withered hand, and very recently healed the servant of a Roman centurion. This servant was “at the point of death” (7.2) In other words, he was mostly dead. As the great theologian, Miracle Max said, *“There’s a big difference between mostly dead and all dead. Mostly dead is slightly alive.”* Luke is arranging these accounts to capture the growing influence and intensity because even the miracles and (as we will see) the teaching of Christ grows in intensity and focus. Jesus does not play games. Following him is no joke. Everything in this account is designed so that you will see this. Even the timing of this encounter. Verse 12 says that “As he drew near to the gate of the town, BEHOLD, a man who had died was being carried out.” This was not a coincidence. There are no coincidences with God, only providential plans. Christ planned to be right there at that moment. This means that this young man died either in the night or earlier that day. Word of this death quickly spread and “a considerable crowd” of people were in the funeral process that was taking the body to the cemetery outside of the town. Jesus and his crowd met the funeral procession right there because...

**A. God wants people to see his works so they believe and benefit from it.**

Look at the text. Can you identify the different groups of people? 1) His disciples (6.12-16) 2) a great crowd that was following 3) the funeral procession: the pallbearers, widow and the crowd from the town. Jesus would raise a young girl back to life, but he did that privately. Here, and later on with Lazarus, he does it publicly. Part of the reason is so that people will realize who he really is. This is also a preview of his resurrection and a promise of sorts for all those who are genuine followers of his. At the same time...

**B. God cares about your need and comes to you.**

On the one hand, this was a perfect opportunity for Christ to display his power and help those who were giving serious thought to who he was a clear and convincing argument for his claim to being God. That is obvious. What is also obvious is the emphasis of the text on the compassion of Christ to this widow. He showed up at the time of her deepest loss and did for her, what was impossible for her or anyone else do, and that is give her back her son. The timing of this helps us appreciate how God sovereignly arranges details in order to display his heart and glory. But the fact that God is large and in charge does not in any way make him aloof or disconnected.

God is sovereign and personal. Christ responds in real time with real emotion that helps us see how much he loves.

## 2. **God's Compassion is astounding.** (13)

Look at the opening phrase of v.13. This is when everything changes. This reminds me of 1 Samuel 17 when David, as a rather young man, had just arrived at the scene of the battle between the Philistines and Israel in order to bring some food to his brothers. V. 23 says, "*As he talked with them, behold the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, (linguistic footsteps that shake the ground with each step) came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before.*" For 40 days, morning and evening, Goliath had been coming out to challenge, taunt and terrify the army of Israel and expose and embarrass King Saul. But something happened in v.23 that had not happened before. V. 23 ends with these words, "And David heard him." That is when the story changes. David heard him and then we hear and the rest of the world hears from David. The same thing is true here in the beginning of v.13. How many grieving spouses, children, and parents who lived in the town of Nain had, through the centuries walked that road through the town gate to the cemetery outside of the town accompanied by family, friends and neighbors in order to mourn over and bury the dead? But this time was different. "The Lord saw her."

What did the King of glory see when he saw her? Did he see a wealthy noblewoman, with deep pockets and extensive connections who could influence the town for his movement, and sign-up citizens to contribute to his cause? What did this woman have that he needed? What value would she add to him? She had nothing. She had no husband, no son and now no future. Humanly speaking she brought nothing to him but need and neediness. People like her would be a drag on the group. People who are all need get in the way, they slow things down, they need attention. People who are not talented and connected get in the way and we don't have time for people like that. We're on a mission. We have things to accomplish, places to go, people to meet, objectives to fulfill. Simply put, she had nothing that the Lord needed. The history of needy people is full of stories of being overlooked or exploited. To Jesus, this widow and now grieving mother is not someone to overlook or exploit. She is someone to love.

*"he had compassion on her"* In that moment, her need aroused the compassion of Christ. Her loss and grief added, stirred and stoked fresh coal to his engine of grace. In that moment, she was why he was there. Her loss became the opportunity for her to know in an unforgettable and personal way that there is a God, that this God is good and that he sees her, knows her and loves her. Many of us struggle with this. We can see how Christ saw this single, vulnerable woman and cared for her and believe it. But somehow, we think that does not translate to us. We tend to think that our needs are a bother to God, or that our weakness and inadequacies frustrate him and are the reason for him to dismiss us and move on to help others more worthy of his attention. Beloved, do not miss the plain, obvious and bold purpose of this account. This is your Savior. This is your King. He came to you in your need. He saw you. He had compassion on you. You did not have to twist his arm to throw you some crumbs of grace. Your need

became the occasion for him to show you mercy. And our God loves to be known as a God of mercy and compassion because his supply is infinite.

My daughter and son-in-law are expecting again. When they told their 2 boys (Judah and Levi), Judah, the oldest, said, "I think that it is just fine with me and Levi." What are you all thinking? We had a good thing going here. Now, I'll have to share you with another kid. There is some truth to that. We have a limited amount of energy, attention, time and resources. But not God. His compassion on this woman did not mean that everyone else that he loved got a little less. The spring of compassion that sources his ocean of grace is inexhaustible.

The compassion of Christ was heard in his words to her. "Do not weep." Can you imagine saying that to a mother who just lost her son? Jesus is the only one who could say that and that would be the absolutely perfect thing for him to say. If any of us said that, it would be an awful thing to say. But Jesus can say that because only Jesus can do what he was about to do.

Before we go on, do you believe that Jesus is really that compassionate? Do you believe that your sins, failures, weaknesses, needs, broken parts and what feels like misplaced pieces arouse the compassion of God? Do you believe that he sees you and has compassion on you? Do you see how, like this mother's grief, your griefs and sorrows can serve a greater purpose? That your needs are known by God, that he sees and that he has spoken? God speaks to your needs. God's words to your needs are God's promises that express ahead of time, his power. "*Do not weep.*" was a command. He was calling her to believe that there was a good reason in this moment, not to weep. There are many times when it is right to weep. Later on, in a similar setting, Jesus would weep. But this command not to weep was his statement of promise. I am going to turn your weeping into joy. I am going to turn your night into day. I am going to turn your darkness into light. I am going to turn your despair into dancing. I am going to turn your death into life. I am going to turn your condemnation into justification. I am going to turn your hell into heaven.

Here, just outside the city gate of the non-descript town of Nain, a widow, now ruined by the loss of her son has the attention of almighty God, not because she has anything to give to him, but because she has everything to gain. This is our God and King. He loves to save! He loves to save because he loves to save you. And he loves to save others and there is plenty of room at the table for more.

### 3. **God's Power is undeniable.** (14-15)

When me and some of my long-time pastor friends get together the conversation often goes to the craziest funerals we've had. Most of the times, the setting is full of tension to begin with and all it takes is an unintentional problem, or the family idiot to show up and fulfill his calling. So here, in this horrific situation, Jesus shows up and he takes over and he doesn't ask permission. He is God and he takes over because he is over all. And he is over this. This horrendously grievous situation is not a problem for him. He came up and touched the bier and the bearers (men carrying the stretcher that held the body) stood still. One touch and they

stopped. Then Jesus spoke again. This time he talked to the dead. Have you ever talked to the dead? Some of you go to the grave of your spouse, or child or parent and you talk. You say stuff like, if you were alive I would tell you about this, or that. It helps you stay connected. It's not like they can actually hear you. But who knows exactly how all that works. Often times when I pray, I ask God to pass on a message to my dad. Let him know that we're doing okay. Let him know to get close to the gate cause mom is arriving pretty soon now. But, when we talk in a cemetery, it's not like anything actually happens. But every time Jesus talks to the dead, they don't stay dead. Every funeral Jesus went to, he blew it up by raising the dead. You need to think deeply about this. Who has the power to raise the dead? Who has the power to raise the dead with simply a command? Here Jesus speaks. That's all he has to do. His Word is power. His Word is life. His Word is authoritative. "Young man, I say to you, arise." That young man had no choice. And on command, he sat up and began to talk. But Jesus was not done. Look at the end of v.15. "Jesus gave him to his mother."

This woman may have had a good marriage and her son may have reminded her of her husband. He may have looked like him, walked like him, sounded like him and had some of his personality. In losing her son, her widowhood was pressed upon her even deeper. But now, Jesus gave her son back to her. She was saved from her despair even as her son was saved from death. The compassionate power of God for this woman may have also been a compassionate power for this young man. Perhaps this was a second chance for him to realize that he had to address some things and all those things had to do with Jesus.

#### 4. How do you respond to this? (16-17)

We fear that which can bring destruction and death. Cathi were on a hike in Bryce Canyon, Utah, when a storm arose. The thunder was intimidating, the rain was unpleasant, but the bolt of lightning that felt like it blinded us and seemed to be just over the ridge, felt like we were electrified and we did something I don't think we have ever done before. We went up the trail a whole lot faster than we had gone down. When you are next to a power that you can't control, you fear. But Jesus did not raise this man from the dead, just to intimidate and they seemed to realize this. After they were seized with fear and began to see how Jesus used his power for good, then they gloried God because it was obvious that a great prophet was among them. They knew the stories of Elijah and Elisha and they made the connection. Elijah raises the son of a widow in Zarephath back to life and Elisha raises the son of the Shunammite woman back to life. However, in both cases, it took quite a bit of effort on the part of the prophets. So, the people are right to connect this to the prophets, but Jesus simply had to speak and life came again.

If you are here as a professing follower of Christ, you can be so encouraged that your Savior and your God has just an unbelievable deep well of compassion and power that he uses for your good and salvation. You may be like the widow, who is tempted to wonder if God has forgotten about you in your need and you can know for certain that he knows. He sees. And always, at the right time he acts. If you are professing follower of Christ you should be encouraged and amazed because we are all like this young man. We were dead in our trespasses and sins

(Ephesians 2.1-3). We had no heart for God; no life in him. We were dead and unresponsive to his voice. "But God being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ." It was the love of God that motivated the power of God to breathe life into our dead souls and cause us to come alive and caused us to believe. And we believed! By grace you have been saved. By grace you have been raised up with him and seated with him in the heavenly places. You have life from God. We are right to be humbled by that and amazed by that.

If you are not a believer, yet. Who or what are you trusting in? What is your salvation in? What do you think justifies you, defines you, defends you, gives you worth? And, can it? It was nice that this crowd of people came from the town to support this widow in her grief, but their support could only go so far. Friend, there is nothing in your world, your resume, your retirement account, that can give you life, forgive you of your sin and give you eternal life, but Christ. Why would you not believe?