

Luke 7:11-17
February 24, 2019

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Imagine being a widow/widower or a single parent with one child and that child dies. What losses are you experiencing besides the loss of your only child? [Let people engage, e.g. desperation due to economic loss, i.e. it left her dependent on public charity for support unless she had other relatives of means; loss of emotional support, etc.]

Transition: Many of us who attend funerals understand the initial loss that others go through, but within 30 days, those who are grieving are easily forgotten. We can be insensitive to the real impacts to those who are left behind. But as we'll discover in today's passage, there is One who is very sensitive to a widow's plight. Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.11:

- Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain ("beautiful," 6 miles SE of Nazareth), and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him.

V.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.

V.13:

- When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry."

V.14:

- Then he went up and touched the coffin (stretcher in that day), and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!"

V.15:

- The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

V.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."

V.17:

- This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.11-12: Let's set the scene. Who are the characters and what's going on? [A funeral procession is going on for a widow, whose only son has died. The procession is headed out of the township of Nain, while Jesus is on his way toward the gate of Nain.]

Q: What is the crowd size based on this scene? [A large crowd is following the procession, while a large crowd is following Jesus. I picture MANY people converging near the gate to the city of Nain!]

Q V.13: What happens when Jesus saw her? [His heart has compassion on her, so he told her, “Don’t cry.”]

Q: Just to be clear, has the widow solicited assistance from Jesus? [No. From her vantage point, it was coincidental that Jesus happened to be approaching Nain when the funeral procession was going on.]

Q V.14: So, Jesus’s compassion for the widow leads Him to do what? [He went up and touched the coffin and said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!”]

Q V.15: What does this very large crowd observe? [The dead man sits up and starts to talk, and Jesus then gives him back to his mother.]

Q V.16: How does the crowd respond? [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.”]

Q: The people labeled Jesus as a “great prophet.” What do you think about that? [Let people engage. They did not make the direct connection of Jesus both Prophet AND God! They were likely comparing Him to the ministries of the great OT prophets Elijah (who brought the widow's son back to life - 1 Ki 17:21-24) and Elisha (who brought back the Shunammite's son from the dead - 2 Ki 4:32-36).]

Observation: We see a foretaste of Heaven's reunited fellowship and the joy was hers. Death has been conquered, and loved ones meet each other again in the presence of the living Son of God.

Q: What do we learn about Jesus based on this story? [Let people engage]

- Jesus is compassionate;
- He cares about our losses;
- Jesus is working mightily in our lives to give us “life” when we least expect it;
- Impossibilities are made possible
- Hopelessness is replaced with hope
- Tears are dried with joy
- Sorrow gives way to His peace
- His voice has power. Even the dead hear His voice.

Point of Interest: That same Jesus who here raised one dead person, shall raise all mankind at the last day. “The hour will come in the which all that are in the grave will hear His voice, and shall come forth; Those who have done good will receive the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil will receive the resurrection of damnation.” (**John 5:28-29**) When the trumpet sounds and Christ commands, there can be no refusal or escape. All must appear before Him in their bodies. All shall be judged according to their works.

Q: I want to think that if Jesus were among us today working such miracles, people would believe. But is that so? If not, why? [Skeptics would offer their explanations, the magicians would produce their counterfeits, and sinful men would go on their way, loving darkness rather than light.]

Q: Jesus brings a dead man to life. What is the spiritual parallel we can draw from this storyline?
[Let people engage – This story illustrates salvation. The whole world was dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1), just as the widow's son was dead. Being dead, we could do nothing to help ourselves—we couldn't even ask for help. But God had compassion on us, and he sent Jesus to raise us to life with him (Ephesians 2:4-7). The dead man did not earn his second chance at life, and we cannot earn our new life in Christ. But we can accept God's gift of life, praise God for it, and use our lives to do his will.]

End with some humor by Rod Mattoon. **A man fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out:**

- A Christian Scientist came along and said: "You only think that you are in a pit."
- A Pharisee said: "Only bad people fall into a pit."
- A Fundamentalist said: "You deserve your pit."
- An IRS man asked if he was paying taxes on the pit.
- A Charismatic said: "Just confess that you're not in a pit."
- An Optimist said: "Things could be worse."
- A Pessimist said: "Things will get worse!"
- Jesus, seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.

LOOK:

We have a compassionate and sympathetic Savior who always gives us help when we need it most.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 196). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The Widow: Jesus' Response to Despair (Luke 7:11–17)

Nain was about twenty-five miles from Capernaum, a good day's journey away, yet Jesus went there even though He was not *requested* to come. Since the Jews buried their dead the same day (Deut. 21:23; Acts 5:5–10), it is likely that Jesus and His disciples arrived at the city gate late in the afternoon of the day the boy died. Four special meetings took place at the city gate that day.

Two crowds met. We can only marvel at the providence of God when we see Jesus meet that funeral procession just as it was heading for the burial ground. He lived on a divine timetable as He obeyed the will of His Father (John 11:9; 13:1). The sympathetic Savior always gives help when we need it most (Heb. 4:16).

What a contrast between the crowd that was following Jesus and the crowd following the widow and her dead son. Jesus and His disciples were rejoicing in the blessing of the Lord, but the widow and her friends were lamenting the death of her only son. Jesus was heading for the city while the mourners were heading for the cemetery.

Spiritually speaking, each of us is in one of these two crowds. If you have trusted Christ, you are going to the city (Heb. 11:10, 13–16; 12:22). If you are “dead in sin,” you are already in the cemetery and under the condemnation of God (John 3:36; Eph. 2:1–3). You need to trust Jesus Christ and be raised from the dead (John 5:24; Eph. 2:4–10).

Two only sons met. One was alive but destined to die, the other dead but destined to live. The term *only begotten* as applied to Jesus means “unique,” “the only one of its kind.” Jesus is not a “son” in the same sense that I am, having been brought into existence by conception and birth. Since Jesus is eternal God, He has always existed. The title *Son of God* declares Christ's divine nature and His relationship to the Father, to whom the Son has willingly subjected Himself from all eternity. All the Persons of the Godhead are equal, but in the “economy” of the Trinity, each has a specific place to fill and task to fulfill.

Two sufferers met. Jesus, “the Man of Sorrows,” could easily identify with the widow's heartache. Not only was she in sorrow, but she was now left alone in a society that did not have resources to care for widows. What would happen to her? Jesus felt the pain that sin and death have brought into this world, and He did something about it.

Two enemies met. Jesus faced death, “the last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26). When you consider the pain and grief that it causes in this world, death is indeed an enemy, and only Jesus Christ can give us victory (see 1 Cor. 15:51–58; Heb. 2:14–15). Jesus had only to speak the word and the boy was raised to life and health.

The boy gave two evidences of life: he sat up and he spoke. He was lying on an open stretcher, not in a closed coffin; so it was easy for him to sit up. We are not told what he said, but it must have been interesting! What an act of tenderness it was for Jesus to take the boy and give him to his rejoicing mother. The whole scene reminds us of what will happen when the Lord returns, and we are reunited with our loved ones who have gone to glory (1 Thes. 4:13–18).

The response of the people was to glorify God and identify Jesus with the Prophet the Jews had been waiting for (Deut. 18:15; John 1:21; Acts 3:22–23). It did not take long for the report of this miracle to spread. People were even more enthusiastic to see Jesus, and great crowds followed Him (Luke 8:4, 19, 42).

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 222)

b. Raising a widow's son (7:11–17).

7:11–17. Luke recorded the raising of the widow's son from the dead so that the ensuing interchange between Jesus and John the Baptist's disciples (vv. 18–23) would have more force.

A large crowd went along with Jesus as He traveled from Capernaum to **Nain** (v. 11). Nain was about 25 miles southwest of Capernaum. **A large crowd** was also with the funeral procession carrying the coffin of a **dead** young man, **the only son of his mother**. The woman was now completely alone and seemingly unprotected, without a close male relative. Help for widows is a major theme in both the Old and the New Testaments, especially under the covenant as related in Deuteronomy. Jesus' **heart went out to her** and He immediately began to comfort her. The verb "heart went out" translates *esplanchnisthē*, a verb used numerous times in the Gospels to mean pity or sympathy. It is related to the noun *splanchna*, "inner parts of the body," which were considered the seat of the emotions. This noun is used 10 times (Luke 1:78; 2 Cor. 6:12; 7:15; Phil. 1:8; 2:1; Col. 3:12; Phile. 7, 12, 20; 1 John 3:17). The woman and the others in the funeral procession must have had faith in Jesus for when **He touched the coffin ... those carrying it stood still**. At Jesus' command the previously **dead man sat up and began to talk**—solid proof that he was truly alive. As a result, the people **were all filled with awe** (*phobos*; cf. comments on 1:12), they **praised God**, they thought Jesus was **a great prophet** (thinking, no doubt, of the ministries of Elijah and Elisha), they noted that God had **come to help His people** (cf. Isa. 7:14), and the **news about Jesus spread**.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1526). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

7:16 Jesus, like Elijah (1 Kg 17:17–24) and Elisha (2 Kg 4:18–37), raised the dead, leading the crowd to speculate that He was a prophet on par with those great prophets. Elisha's raising of the Shunammite's son took place close to NT Nain, the site of this miracle. It is difficult to tell whether Luke presented their speculation as referring to the prophet of Dt 18:15. Though the verbal parallelism between their remarks and that of Dt is strong, the absence of the article with "prophet" leaves it unclear (see Mt 21:11; Jn 6:14; Acts 3:22).

Stein, R. H. (1992). *Luke* (Vol. 24, pp. 221–224). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

In the previous account Luke demonstrated Jesus' divine authority and power to heal someone near death. Here Luke revealed the even greater power of Jesus to raise someone from the dead. This is the first of three or perhaps four such raisings in Luke-Acts (Luke 8:40–48; Acts 9:36–43; cf. also Acts 20:7–12). It is evident from Luke 7:22 that this account functions as a Christological explanation of who Jesus is because Jesus answered the question, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (7:20) with, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard." In the present account Jesus is described as a "great prophet" (7:16) who

has power even over life and death. Clearly Luke sought to demonstrate that the power of God was present in Jesus of Nazareth in a unique way; and even if this one account does not in itself contain a complete Christological affirmation that Jesus is the Christ, the Lord, the Son of God, Luke wanted his readers to understand this incident in conjunction with and in support of such a Christology. It was after all the “Lord” (7:13) who was referred to as the “great prophet.”

We find an important parallel to this story in 1 Kgs 17:17–24, where Elijah raised the son of a widow of Zarephath (cf. also 2 Kgs 4:8–37). The close similarity between these two accounts suggests that Luke wrote 7:11–17 with 1 Kgs 17:17–24 in mind.

Comments

7:11 Jesus went to a town called Nain. Nain is located six miles south southeast of Nazareth and is about twenty-five miles from Capernaum.

7:12 A dead person was being carried out. Luke used a technical term here for carrying out a corpse for burial.

The only son of his mother. Luke provided this description to reveal not only the emotional loss of the woman but also the desperate economic straits she was now in. With neither a husband nor a son to care for her, she would have had no means of support. The term “only” also is found in Luke 8:42 and in 9:38, where Luke added it to the Markan parallels (cf. Mark 5:23; 9:17).

And she was a widow. This recalls Luke 4:25–26 and 1 Kgs 17:10.

And a large crowd from the town was with her. Attendance at a funeral was considered a work of love, and the mourning for an only child would have been especially bitter. By his mention of the large crowd, Luke further heightened the tragedy and revealed that the things he recorded in Luke-Acts were “not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26).

7:13 When the Lord. Luke in narrating this account picked up the term “Lord” from the previous account (Luke 7:6) and used this favorite post-resurrection title to describe Jesus. This is not surprising because for Luke and his readers the Jesus of this story and the church’s risen Lord were one and the same. See comments on 1:43.

His heart went out to her. The woman’s dire situation caused Jesus to have compassion on her. This compassion, however, was no condescending pity but rather a loving concern.

Don’t cry. This command anticipates that Jesus would do something.

7:14 Then he went up and touched the coffin. Touching a dead body made one ceremonially unclean (Num. 19:11, 16), but Jesus ignored this convention. This was not a closed coffin, but a bier or litter used to carry the body outside the city to its burial place.

He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” In this healing, unlike the preceding one, no mention is made of anyone’s faith. This shows that Jesus’ healings ultimately were not dependent on the faith of the person being healed but on his own power and might. By his word alone the sick were healed and the dead raised.

7:15 The dead man sat up. Jesus’ purpose in performing this miracle was not to witness to who he was but rather to show compassion toward this woman. However, even though this was not Jesus’ purpose, the miracle does in fact function as a sign of who he is both in the original situation and for Luke. This is evident from 7:22. For “sat up,” compare Acts 9:40. For Luke the healing serves as a “sign” of the arrival of God’s kingdom and its Messiah. In Acts such implicit signs of the arrival of the kingdom and of the Messiah give way to a more direct proclamation of their presence.

And began to talk. This and the man’s sitting up are proof of the miracle.

Jesus gave him back to his mother. Compare 1 Kgs 17:23 (LXX), where we have the exact wording (cf. also 2 Kgs 4:36).

7:16 They were all filled with awe. Literally, *Fear took [possession of] all*. This fear was not terror but holy awe. See comments on 1:65.

And praised God. For a similar tie between an experience of reverential awe and the consequent glorifying of God, cf. Luke 2:13, 20; 5:26.

“A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. Luke did not understand this title as an inadequate confession but as indicating that Jesus, as Elijah in 1 Kgs 17:17–24, possesses God’s unique authority and power. Whether this is an allusion to *the* prophet of Deut 18:15–18 is uncertain. For the comparison of Jesus to Elijah, cf. 4:24–26. For the description of Jesus as a prophet, cf. 4:23–24; 7:39; 9:8, 19; 13:33; 22:64; 24:19; Acts 3:22; 7:37. Like the OT prophets, Jesus was concerned for the poor, and he would later be put to death as the OT prophets were (Luke 4:24; 6:22–23; 11:47–51; 13:33–34). The title “Lord” in 7:13 shows Luke’s belief that Jesus was more than a great prophet.

God has come to help his people. This is a common OT expression describing God’s actions on behalf of his people (Exod 4:31; Ruth 1:6; Ps 106:4; cf. Luke 1:48). Compare Luke 1:68, 79; 19:44; Acts 15:14, which reveal that the theological emphasis of Luke 1–2 stands in close continuity with that of Luke 3–24.

7:17 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country. For “Judea” see comments on 1:5. Compare 4:14, 37.

The Lukan Message

Within this passage Luke continues the description of Jesus of Nazareth begun in 7:1. Jesus is described positively as a great prophet in 7:16. He was not just “a” prophet but “a great” prophet. For Luke this was a correct description as far as it went, but it clearly was inadequate by itself. Even within this passage it is evident that Jesus’ prophetic ministry must be understood in the context of his being “Lord.” While it is true that in the original setting of Jesus this form of address (Aramaic *Mar*) lacked the fuller understanding that came after the resurrection, for Luke the address “Lord” would have been understood in its richest sense. See Introduction 8 (4). Who is this Jesus of Nazareth? He is the great prophet and the Lord (7:13) who is “exalted to the right hand of God” (Acts 2:33–35). He who raised the widow’s son would one day himself be raised from the dead. Through this account Luke also wanted his readers to understand that Jesus is the one whom the Scriptures said would come and is the fulfillment of the hopes and longings of God’s people (Luke 7:20–23).

Two other themes appear in this account: an emphasis on God’s sovereign rule of history (see Introduction 8 [1]) and an emphasis on glorifying God. God has visited his people (7:16) in order to bring about the fulfillment of the promises he has made to them. In visiting his people, he has inaugurated the kingdom of God. See Introduction 8 (2). The emphasis on glorifying God (7:16) also appears frequently in Luke.