

## From Grief to Glorification

### Luke 7:11-17

One of the difficult tasks I have as a pastor is in performing funerals. At one church where I served, the church was across from a funeral home and I would occasionally get a call from the funeral director asking if I could do a funeral for a family that had no church affiliation. As difficult as they were, I never refused to perform those services.

As a hospice chaplain I often did services for hospice patients who passed away, probably averaging one a month.

Death is never easy, even when it's anticipated, even when it's a Christian. We can say we are prepared for it but it still hits us hard. Here's my opinion, and maybe you share it as well: while we honor the person who has passed away, funerals aren't really for the person who died, they are for the living. They arouse memories, provide some semblance of encourage, and offer hope.

But death is inevitable. It was guaranteed in the opening pages of Scripture, evidenced in the various genealogies, and verified by the writer of **Hebrews (9:27)** who states that **"It is appointed unto men once to die."** Paul weighs in on the topic as well by writing that the debt we owe for sin is death (**Romans 3:23**). Sin therefore is the crux of the matter, and death results.

When God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden to tend and care for it, He gave only one negative rule. **"And the Lord God commanded man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'" (Genesis 2:16-17)**

We know from the Genesis account that Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and listen to the enticing words of the serpent who claimed that such an act

wouldn't bring death. But the fact of the matter is that God's Word has proven true and ever since their disobedience every person has succumbed to the penalty for sin, that penalty is death – death occurring both physically and spiritually. The sobering truth of this came at the indictment on man by God when He cursed the ground and declared **"for dust you are and to dust you will return."** Nothing man could do would be able to stave off death and ever since then man has done all he can to attempt to prolong the inevitable. No matter what man attempts, he will never create a machine or a cream or a pill that will keep the angel of death from calling and claiming a life. It is part of the curse we are all under.

According to the Ecology Global Network there are 131.4 million births per year compared to 55.3 million deaths.

That equates to 360,000 births each day compared to 151,600 deaths.

That equates to 15,000 births each hour compared to 6,316 deaths.

That equates to 250 births each minute compared to 105 deaths.

That equates to four births each second compared to two deaths.

There is no getting around it, death is a fact of life, something that Jesus faced one day in ministry. We find it in **Luke 7:11-17**.

The curse of sin is evident

The compassion of the Savior is experienced

The confession of the crowd is expressed

## I. THE CURSE OF SIN IS EVIDENT – v. 11-12

It has been just a short while since the healing of the centurion's servant. The KJV states that it was the next day while the NIV is less definitive. In either case, it wasn't all that long following the previous miracle. We find in our text that Jesus traveled to the town of Nain. Nowhere else in Scripture is it

identified, however, we know it's location based on archeology. It was about 24 miles southwest of Capernaum and about 6 miles southeast of Nazareth. Nearby was the town of Shunum. You may remember this as the town where Elisha aided the Shunamite woman whose son died from a severe fever. Elisha prayed earnestly and the boy was brought back to life. You can read the story in **II Kings 4:8-37**.

Nain was also near the town of Endor (and no, this is not the forest moon of Endor on which the last epic battle of Star Wars takes place). Endor is also mentioned in the Old Testament, **I Samuel 28:7-25**. It is the town that King Saul traveled to on the eve of his last battle where he enlisted the aid of a witch to conger up the spirit of Samuel. Heaven's gates had shut up its ear to his plea because he had rejected following God, so he went to the gates of hell to ask a medium to help him.

It is here in this little, obscure village called Nain that Jesus will perform another miracle where someone is brought back to life. It is here that death and life will meet.

As we have seen in the ministry of Jesus He is followed by His disciples and a large crowd. It is at this precise moment that death and life meet. It is here that we see the effects of sin's curse.

### A. The Curse of Sin Brings Death

We read that as Jesus was approaching the town gate He met a funeral procession carrying a coffin. Their destination was the town cemetery that, according to archeology, was about a 10 minute walk outside of town.

Notice if you will the difference between this person and the person in the previous passage. The servant in our passage from last week was about to die. The person in today's passage is dead. There is no hope for him. Life has left him. Death is

defined as the moment when the soul and spirit are separated from the body. The normal functions of the body have ceased. There is no respirations, no pulse, no brain activity, no blood flow – everything physically stops functioning.

This was one of the meanings behind the statement of God to Adam that should the time come if he willfully disobeyed God, he would die. Now God did not mean that in the exact moment of disobedience he would die, but that from that moment on his body would begin to decay, grow old, succumb to the effects of sin where things not meant to be would begin to ravage the body and eventually he would die physically.

The evolutionists have it all wrong when it comes to the timing of man on the earth occurring millions of years after the dinosaurs. Man was created perfect and only after his disobedience and curse did he begin to experience such things as cancer and arthritis, and well, death. If man came after and sin with man how do they explain that dinosaurs have been found to have arthritis and the evidence of cancer in their bones all part of the curse if the curse of sin didn't occur until millions of years later when man supposedly came into existence? All of creation was affected by that one act of disobedience and feels the pangs of death.

### **Romans 8:19-23**

Everything around us has been affected by the curse of sin. All this was brought on by the sin of Adam. As the natural head of the human race, the whole human family is directly affected by his sin and so according to **Romans 5:12** “**death passed upon all men.**” The result is universal and not only on mankind but on all creation as Paul points out in Romans 8. Everyone takes part in the penalty. Just as a forest of oak trees can come from a single acorn; so an entire population can come from one man. Therefore, his sin is also imputed to us making us share in the same destiny. The curse that was placed on him is the curse that is also on us.

That curse is death.

The man in the coffin being borne by others had succumbed to death. By what means we do not know. That is irrelevant. The fact of the matter is that he is dead. It probably happened earlier in the day. Jewish custom was to bury the dead on the same day. He was wrapped in a simple shroud with spices placed on the body. They were then laid in an open coffin or stretcher that would be carried by family and friends. The processional would take some time to reach the gravesite because they would pause multiple times to allow others to bear the burden of the deceased body, at which time there would be lamentations before proceeding.

It is possible given the distance from Capernaum where Jesus had been to the town of Nain where He was going that this young man had not even died when Jesus began His trek in that direction.

**How many of you would agree that this is not a coincidental meeting?**

**How many of you would agree that the events of Jesus's life were divinely orchestrated, that there was a divine purpose behind what He did and even in this meeting?**

**Do you believe that the circumstances of your life are divinely orchestrated?**

At the precise time when Jesus, His disciples and the crowd that followed Him arrived at the gate of the town another crowd was departing from the town. At the gate they met: life and death.

The curse of sin brings death.

The curse of sin also brings despair.

## **B. The Curse of Sin Brings Despair**

Grief is always associated with death. Though some like to romanticize it or make it heroic, there is nothing romantic about death as much as Shakespeare wanted to portray in Romeo and Juliet. Others will go so far as to suggest that a person had a good death, they went peacefully or whatever

other clichés they want to opine. There really isn't anything good about death because it is a part of the curse, a part of God's judgment on mankind for sin. Death hurts. It doesn't matter if the person died in their sleep or died from natural causes or died from some illness or disease or tragically. We hurt and are grief stricken when it occurs and we carry that grief with us until it's time to breathe our last.

This woman was in great emotional pain. She was leading the crowd of mourners and the funeral bier. Luke reveals for us some facts about her that make this event even more tragic. The first is that this was her only son; the second is that she was a widow and the third is that the townsfolk also mourned for her.

Let's take the second fact first. She was a widow. She had already lost her husband. When and how we aren't told, but when the head of the house died the effect of death in that culture was devastating. He was typically the sole bread winner, the one who earned money to sustain his family. When he died, it was the responsibility of any sons in the family to care for his mother. That leads us back to the son's death. He was an only son. It's the same term used of Jesus in **John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..."**

This was her only son. There wasn't anyone else now who would care for her physical well-being. She was alone. No wonder her grief is significant.

The third group we see with her are townsfolk. Among them would be paid musicians and mourners. It was customary to pay someone to come in and mourn on your behalf. We find them at the time Jesus healed the daughter of Jairus mocking Jesus about the condition of the girl. Notice what verse 12 says **"And a large crowd from the town was with her."** I don't think that just means they were physically with her paying their respects by attending the funeral procession. I think it means they were with her emotionally. Romans 12:15 says we are to **"weep with those**

**who weep.”** They clearly understood the ramifications his death would have on her well-being. She had no one else to care for her and they also mourned for her. The curse of sin brings death and despair.

Now before we go on with this passage there is one other thought I want to convey about the curse of sin and the result of death. It is something even more significant than physical death and that is spiritual death. Physical death is merely the separation of the body from the soul and spirit. Spiritual death is also separation – but separation from God for eternity. The moment we are born we begin to die physically. The moment we are born we are born spiritually dead. And while there is no cure for physical death there is a cure for spiritual death. It’s called regeneration.

The Bible talks about two deaths. **Hebrews 9:27** speaks about both. **“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after that the judgment.”** Judgment is the second death, the time of reckoning for those not regenerated by the Spirit of God who makes us a new creation. It is at that time when judgment will culminate in the eternal separation of those who refused God’s regeneration, God’s remedy for sin. This too, was part of the curse of God in the garden – that man would die spiritually.

Our passage helps us to see the plan God has, to give us life. We see it in the compassion the Savior has experienced by both the mother and her son.

## **II. THE COMPASSION OF THE SAVIOR IS EXPERIENCED – v. 13-15**

If there is ever a time when we need life, it is when death knocks. When grief is its greatest that is the precise time when Jesus steps in to meet us in our time of need. Jesus is never too late and He is never too early. After Lazarus had died Jesus was questioned as to why He didn’t come sooner. If He

had Lazarus might not have died. Jesus comes to us at just the right time at the time we need Him most.

In His latest worship album, Michael W. Smith sings this beautiful song of hope. It’s simply titled *Sovereign Over Us*.

There is strength within the sorrow  
There is beauty in our tears  
And You meet us in our mourning  
With a love that casts out fear  
You are working in our waiting  
You’re sanctifying us  
When beyond our understanding  
You’re teaching us to trust.

*Your plans are still to prosper  
You have not forgotten us  
You’re with us in the fire and the flood  
You’re faithful forever  
Perfect in love  
You are sovereign over us.*

You are wisdom unimagined  
Who could understand Your ways  
Reigning high above the Heavens  
Reaching down in endless grace  
You’re the lifter of the lowly  
Compassionate and kind  
You surround and You uphold me  
And Your promises are my delight.

Even what the enemy means for evil  
You turn it for our good  
You turn it for our good and for Your glory  
Even in the valley, You are faithful  
You’re working for our good  
You’re working for our good and for Your glory.

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### **A. The Savior’s Reassurance – v. 13**

**“When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said ‘Don’t cry.’”**

The phrase here **“His heart went out to her”** is one word in the Greek and the KJV renders it compassion. It means to be moved or to yearn for and speaks of the sorrow someone feels toward another with the desire to help in some way. This word is only used in the gospels and only used of Jesus.

In **Matthew 9:36** when Jesus looked at the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were like helpless sheep without a shepherd and then He challenged His disciples to consider the need for workers in the spiritual harvest of souls because the workers were few.

In both instances of feeding the multitudes He looked with compassion on their need and miraculously fed them. (**Matthew 14:14; 15:32**)

In **Matthew 20:34** He looked with compassion on the two blind men and healed them.

Jesus was moved with compassion when He saw the woman and knew her plight and experienced her sorrow. And then He said what we might consider to be lacking in discretion. This woman had just lost her only son, her sole means of care. She was on the way out of the town to bury him and Jesus tells her to **“stop crying”**. Maybe you’ve heard someone say stop crying or I’ll give you something to cry about.

Let us never forget the words of **Hebrews 4:15** which remind us that we have a High Priest in Jesus who is able to sympathize with everything we are going through and helps us through them.

But there must have been something comforting about the way in which Jesus spoke those words. Words that could otherwise be construed as calloused and insensitive were words that brought comfort and hope. In the words of the song I just shared **“You meet us in our mourning, With a love that casts out fear, You are working in our waiting You’re sanctifying us, When beyond our understanding, You’re teaching us to trust.”**

Coming from anyone else those words would seem rather crass, but not when spoken by Jesus. In them we see the Savior’s reassurance. We also see the Savior’s response.

## **B. The Savior’s Response – v. 14-15**

Notice a series of actions.

He touched the coffin. According to Old Testament law, the very act defiled Him.

### **Numbers 19:11-13**

Let me remind you that because Jesus is holy and pure, He cannot be defiled by sin or the effects of sin, which in this case is death. The very touch of the coffin was an act of compassion.

Disturbing or hindering a funeral procession was considered disrespectful. The custom of the day was to stop and give way to the funeral procession. It is still supposed to be that way today in our country. **I’ve been in the lead vehicle in a funeral procession when a vehicle has raced down the road to cut in front of us to get to the grocery market. I’ve also been in procession when oncoming vehicles will pull to the side of the road and stop until the procession has passed. I’ve been told by some funeral directors that in the south the procession might be out in the middle of nowhere when other vehicles not in the procession will stop and the occupants will get out and stand in respect.**

In Jesus’ day it was also customary that if a funeral procession approached that you also joined in the march to the gravesite. Here two large crowds meet, who would give way – life or death? Only Jesus has the power to bridge the gap between the two and to rescue those in death. Scholar A.T. Robertson writes that it is at this moment that the Lord of life confronts death. Rather than continue, they paused, perhaps unsure of what to do. Jesus touched the coffin and they stood still. Maybe they were waiting for a public outcry by the crowd for this disruption. While they stopped Jesus

continued. He stopped the coffin and then he spoke to the corpse. **“Young man, I say to you, get up!”** I think he spoke directly to the young man in the coffin because if He hadn't the resurrection power that raised him, would have also cleared out the other graves already occupied.

**John Philips writes “Jesus felt the pain that sin and death have brought into this world, and He did something about it.”**

You have to wonder what the crowd thought at that moment, don't you? **“Get up.”**

“What did He just say?”

“He's kidding, right?”

“Who does this guy think He is?”

“That's laughable.”

“Dead is dead and He wants him to sit up?”

If I read my Scripture right, it had occurred five previous times.

Elijah raised someone from the dead.

Elisha raised someone from the dead.

Then there was the time Israel was embroiled in battle. Some guy was killed in the fight and in a hurry his friends happened to through him in the same grave where Elisha had been buried and the dead guy jumped back to life.

There was also the valley of dry bones found in Ezekiel 37 where God put them all back together with flesh and blood and brought them back to life.

Finally, in **Genesis 2:7** there was the lifeless form of Adam laying in the dust from which He was formed and God breathed into him the **“breath of life and the man became a living being.”**

This is the first time Jesus would raise someone from the dead, but it would not be His last and it did not end with His own death, resurrection, and ascension. There is a day yet to come when the Lord will come down from heaven, will give a loud command along with the voice of the arch angel and the sound of a trumpet blast when all the dead in Christ will rise again.

If we think the raising of this man to life was cause for celebration, think about the celebration when every dead person who placed faith in Christ rises from the dead to live again in their transformed bodies as they meet the Lord in the air. For those like this mother who have lost a loved one to death, but who died in Christ, this is great news, this is news to celebrate. And while we weep we do not weep as those who have no hope. Paul tells the Corinthian believers that when the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will all be changed.

When Jesus spoke to the dead man lying in the coffin to rise up and the man immediately sat up is but a foreshadowing of the resurrection power that Jesus has over death and the grave. He not only had the power to raise Himself from the dead, He has power to raise us up from the dead as well. Because of His power death no longer has mastery. When He commands death and the grave to give up those who are in Christ, guess what, death must obey. And when Jesus spoke to the young man to arise, he did! Amen? In His compassion, Jesus reassures and He responds.

When life and death meet here, it is not life that gives way, it is death. Jesus is the resurrection and life and just as darkness must give way to light, so death must give way to life. We serve a Lord who is moved by our needs and our greatest need moved Him to do something about it. He died on the cross in our place so that the power of sin and the curse of death would no longer bind us. His resurrection assures us of our own, that we will not remain dead.

Now I want you to notice something. No one asked Jesus to do anything here. The centurion sent others to ask Jesus to help, but the woman nor anyone in the crowd, not even His disciples who had witnessed other miracles asked Jesus to do anything for the woman. He did it on His own. It's the same with us. We have a need called sin, resulting in death, and not a one of us cried out to Jesus to do

something for us. But in compassion **“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”**

**(Romans 5:8)**

**“It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning, great is Thy faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:2-3)**

In some respects this last point is a sad ending, but it’s like the response of so many people today.

### **III. THE CONFESSION OF THE CROWD – v. 16-17**

#### **A. The Crowd’s Praise – v. 16a**

**“They were all filled with awe and praised God.”**

That is the right and appropriate response for this and all miracles. God deserves all glory.

**Revelation 4:11** sums it up nicely: **“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”**

He not only gives us life, but He sustains it. Psalms 139 supports that by saying we have been fearfully and wonderfully created by God who has ordained all the days of our life. It is only through Him that we live and move and exist. And truly the One who gives us life and has conquered death for us deserves our praise.

That this young man was raised to life again, spoke to the power of God and the whole crowd glorified God. They rightly praised Him. But while their response of praise was correct, their response revealed the crowd’s problem.

#### **B. The Crowd’s Problem – v. 16b-17**

**“A great prophet has appeared among us,’ they said.”**

They completely missed the point of who Jesus was. He’s a great man, able to call on God to do great things, but He is only a man. That’s the unfortunate response of many today. Who is Jesus? Many say He is just a great teacher, a compassionate man, but only a man, nothing more. Jesus asked His disciples one day about the popular opinion of His identity. It was widespread and news about this event spread all over. A great prophet is among us. Peter, though, got it right. **“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”**

Our passage reminds us that in any era, any society, any town there are only two types of crowds. There are those who follow Jesus, believing that He is the Son of God, able to give eternal life. They are the ones who are headed to the city. They are the ones who will come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. He is its architect. **(Hebrews 12:22; 11:10)**

Then there are those who don’t follow Jesus, the ones still dead in sin. The ones headed to the cemetery, the ones under God’s condemnation. They are following the dead instead. Jesus reveals that He is master over death and the grave.

#### **Are you following life or death today?**

If you are following life and the life giver Jesus, make sure you pause and give Him the glory He deserves.

If you are still following death, today is a day you can choose to recognize that Jesus is the only giver of life, so that someday, one day, any day, when the trumpet sounds and He calls you will be among those who are raised up from the dead. On the day that happens that will be a physical thing. The day on which you placed your faith in Christ, you were raised up to new life. That’s worth celebrating.

Jesus has made the way possible to overcome death. **Will you listen to the sound of His voice and rise up?**