

“A Widow’s Encounter With Jesus”

Luke 7:11-17

10.17.21

Life is difficult when you feel like you have no hope. The world looks scary and you feel overwhelmed. You wonder if this is how the rest of your life is going to go?

Have you ever felt this way? Well there is good news. We have a God that can give hope in a very hopeless situation. We have a God who actually cares. As we continue our series “Encounters with Jesus” we are going to see an encounter between Jesus and a widow who is about to bury her only son. That encounter brings hope to the hopeless.

Please join me in reading Luke 7:11–17 (ESV). Page 863 in the Red Bible under the chairs.

“Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. ¹² As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. ¹³ And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” ¹⁴ Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” ¹⁵ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶ Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!” ¹⁷ And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.”

The divine appointment.

Jesus traveled to Nain with a large crowd in tow. Nain was roughly 25 miles south west of Capernaum. **[Show map]** Jesus never spontaneously took off and went somewhere just for fun. Every step He took was purposeful. He was led by the Spirit to various

towns and cities in order to encounter the people God had prepared for Jesus to encounter. There was never any meetings by luck or chance. They were all ordained.

For example, John 4:4, “And he **had** to pass through Samaria.” Good Jews went around Samaria. Jesus had to go through Samaria because the Father had a divine appointment for Him with the woman at the well.

Jesus walked 25 miles to Nain because of a divine appointment God had planned out.

Please click on slide of me and the fish :) How did that picture get in there? :)

As Jesus and His entourage were nearing the town gate, another crowd was coming out of the town. A funeral procession was heading to the burial site outside the town. At the front of the funeral procession was a widow whose son had died.

It was tradition for women to lead funeral processions. Jewish religious leaders falsely held Eve responsible for sin entering the world resulting in death for she took the first bite. An ancient Jewish commentary explains, “Woman, who brought death into our world, ought to lead the way in the funeral procession.” (“Jewish Social Life”).

But God held Adam responsible for bringing sin and death into our world because he was supposed to lead and protect his wife. Romans 5:12 (NLT), “When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought **death**, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.” Men should be leading the way in funeral processions.

This grieving woman was facing

A hopeless situation.

A young woman’s security and financial support was in her father until she was old enough to get married. Then she would be transferred to her husband’s care.

It was important that the wife be able to give birth to a son. The son was her insurance policy if her husband would die. The son would take ownership of her security and financial support if the husband died or was no longer able to work.

We learn from Luke that this woman was a widow. Her husband had died. But she had support because God gave her a son. The son had been caring for his mother's needs since her husband could not. But now the widow's son is dead.

A younger woman could potentially get married again and be under the security of her new husband. This widow was most likely too old to remarry. For if a woman was past her ability to conceive children, there was little hope she would get remarried.

In those times, there was no government welfare- no government handouts, no government programs to assist the vulnerable. God commanded that the Jews allow widows and orphans and foreigners to pick the extra grains left over. Deuteronomy 24:19–21 (NLT), “When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don’t go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all you do. ²⁰ When you beat the olives from your olive trees, don’t go over the boughs twice. Leave the remaining olives for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. ²¹ When you gather the grapes in your vineyard, don’t glean the vines after they are picked. Leave the remaining grapes for the foreigners, orphans, and widows.”

Not all farmers looked out for the vulnerable. The best security and hope for a widow was her son. Without a son, the woman had little hope.

As the woman was walking and weeping among a big crowd, she did not go unnoticed. **Jesus responded to the widow's hopelessness.**

Verse 13, “And when the Lord **saw her**, he had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’”

Jesus saw the woman. He saw her pain. His heart went out to her. He felt deep compassion for her. That is God's character. He sees people's situation and responds.

When pregnant Hagar ran away from Abraham and Sarah, she was all alone in the wilderness. Hagar was an Egyptian foreigner. Hagar was Sarah's servant. From a Jewish perspective she was a second class citizen. But not to God. The angel of the Lord went to her in the wilderness and spoke words of encouragement and hope. Listen to her response: "So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, **"You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me."**"
Genesis 16:13 (ESV)

Jesus is the God who sees. He saw the woman and commanded "Do not weep." If it was anyone else saying that to the woman it would be incredibly insensitive. How could she not weep, when her world was turned upside down? How could she not weep when her only son was dead? How could she not weep when her future looked so bleak? How could she not weep when she would be going back to an empty home?

When someone has suffered a loss, people in their desire to help, can actually hurt the one they desire to help by saying things that don't actually help. **What are some things we shouldn't say or do?**

First, be careful about using clichés when speaking. Some statements that sound good may not be helpful.

Statements like: **"It is all part of God's plan"**- a true statement but is it helpful right now in their pain?

"We are all going to die someday"- again true but how does that encourage the person?

“Just remember Romans 8:28, God works all things for the good of those who love Him.” Scripture is definitely a great help in healing from losses but we need to use it carefully at the beginning- focusing more on God’s love and care rather than on His will and purpose.

“I know how you feel.” Do you really know how he/she feels? You may have had a similar loss but you still do not know how he/she feels. We each come to our grief with different childhoods, religious beliefs, experiences, and feelings. So how you deal with the same kind of loss can be totally different.

Second, choose not to judge someone’s process of grieving. Since each person’s grieving process is different, we should never put a timetable on their recovery. Let’s not say things like, “You should be over this by now?” Or “You sure cry a lot.” Or, “You should be where I am. I went through the same situation you have but I have already recovered.”

Third, be slow to speak and quick to listen. Jay Bayly in his book *Last Things We Talk About* tells how he and his wife coped with the death of three of their sons. He wrote, **“Sensitivity in the presence of grief should usually make us more silent, more listening**... An arm around the shoulder, a firm grip of the hand, a kiss: these are the proofs grief needs, not logical reasoning. I was sitting, torn by grief. Someone came and talked with me of God’s dealings, of why it happened, of hope beyond the grave. He talked constantly, he said things I knew were true. I was unmoved, except to wish he’d go away. He finally did. Another came and sat beside me. He didn’t ask leading questions. He just sat beside me for an hour and more, listened when I said something, answered briefly, prayed simply, left. I was moved. I was comforted. I hated to see him go.” Your good ears and loving hug speak volumes to the grief stricken.

Fourth, when you do speak don’t be afraid to talk about the loss with the one grieving. Our natural tendency is to steer away from any conversation that is heading

toward the pain. But think about it from a grieving person's point of view. Say your spouse of 20 years has died. That is a tremendous loss. There are so many memories and feelings to sift through. But the people who can help you recover are not bringing up your loss so you can't process your pain in their company. That leaves you alone to process the pain.

Fifth, send a card or note telling them you haven't forgotten their loss- especially as time goes by. Most people are bombarded with sympathy and love at the beginning of the pain but tend to be forgotten after several months. Scriptures that have encouraged you or poems that are helpful are good to include in the card or note.

Jesus said to the widow, "Do not weep." And then He gave her hope by doing a miracle.

The dead son was brought back to life.

Verse 14, "Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." ¹⁵ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother."

A bier was a portable structure to carry the dead to the burial site. The dead person would be visible laying on it. As the pallbearers carried the bier, Jesus walked up and touched it. Those carrying the bier stopped. They just watched Jesus.

What is He up to? Maybe He is going to say some comforting words to the widow and friends? Maybe He is going to help carry the casket out to the burial site. But Jesus does something no one would expect. He speaks to the dead man.

Have you ever tried speaking to someone who is hard of hearing? It can become very frustrating trying to have a conversation. The louder you need to talk the more frustrating it can become.

But Jesus wasn't talking to a person who was hard of hearing; He was talking with a dead man. And Jesus was heard. For He is God. He can make demons shudder. He can make the storms stop with one word. And He can even make the dead rise. Jesus said to the man, "Young man, I say to you, arise."

The dead man sat up and began to talk. The instant rising and speaking of the dead man, proved that not only his life but also his strength and health returned.

I wish Luke would've recorded what the young man said after immediately coming back to life. We don't know if the man loved God and followed him so we don't know if he was in heaven or hell after he died. If he was in hell, you know he would've been ecstatic and so thankful for an opportunity to repent and get right with God. Thank you Jesus!

If the man was in heaven, I think he would've shared his disappointment with having to come back to life on earth. "What? Why did you bring me back here?" Think what his mom might have to deal with the rest of her life. I wonder how many times she might hear her son say, "You know if it wasn't for your crying, I'd still be in heaven right now."

Jesus took the man and gave him back to his mother. What an intimate act of love. What a gift of hope.

The crowd witnessed an amazing sight to see. A man, who was previously dead, resurrected before their eyes. Luke described how the crowd responded.

The crowd responded in fear and praise.

Verse 16, "Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"¹⁷ And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country."

The people responded with fear- a natural response when in the presence of God. They were in great awe and praised God.

They attributed this resurrection to a great prophet and God being present. Not too far from Naim, Elisha the prophet brought back to life the son of a previously barren woman. So the people would've known about that story.

They also would've most likely known the prophecy that Moses proclaimed many years earlier. Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV), "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen."

They thought Jesus was a great prophet. But Jesus is more than a prophet. He is God the Son. He is God in human flesh. Yes, God had visited them. The news of what Jesus did was proclaimed in many places.

Before Jesus showed up, the town was in deep mourning. The town was escorting a sad widow's dead son to the cemetery. But then Jesus shows up and the situation totally changes.

Can you imagine the total change in emotions? It went from a very solemn and somber funeral to a joyous, cheering and dancing in the streets atmosphere.

They experienced a small taste of heaven. No more weeping. No more sadness. No more death. Total joy. Total peace. Total hearts full of love.

What can we apply to our own lives from this encounter with Jesus and the widow? I want us to apply two things:

First,

God doesn't look away from people's pain.

It is very difficult to see people in pain. Some people experience such tragedy and pain that we might naturally look away in order to not see it or be impacted by it.

We might rather hear positive and uplifting stories. We might want to keep away from the sad stories.

God is right in the thick of it. He doesn't look away. He enters into our pain and is with us.

David wrote Psalm 23:4 (ESV), "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

The broken-hearted are not alone. Psalm 34:18 (ESV), "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit."

Heb 13:5, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Jesus saw the widow's pain and brought her son back to life. Jesus sees your pain. He doesn't run away or look away. He is present with you in it.

You might be wondering if God loves me then why didn't He stop my loved one from dying or why didn't He resurrect my loved one?

God does care. He does love you. We can tell from this text and others dealing with widows that it wasn't because God doesn't have a heart or doesn't care. It wasn't because God is not compassionate enough. It wasn't because God couldn't understand the pain of losing a child. It wasn't because God didn't understand your situation.

The question to why didn't God keep your loved one alive can only be answered by God Himself. His understanding and purposes are far greater than our ability to understand.

As I was preparing this sermon, I was thinking about this question again. I can relate to this story. My mother became a widow at the age of 37. She was left with three kids- 13, 11 and 8. Why didn't God answer our prayers to stop my dad from dying? Or why didn't God resurrect my dad, for we were praying our little hearts out?

What came to my mind was the thought that God is a very personal God. He has a personal relationship with those who know Jesus as Savior and Lord. And He works in each of our lives differently.

After Jesus arose and reinstated Peter from his failure. Peter asked what was to happen to John? John 21:21–22 (NLT), “Peter asked Jesus, “What about him, Lord?”²² Jesus replied, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? As for you, follow me.”

What is God's will for someone in their situation may not be what is God's plan for me at that same time. What was best for my father was to be in God's presence. There is no better place for him to be.

I have often thought about what God rescued my dad from having to experience. He had a difficult life growing up. And God decided that his time on earth was complete and that he would be able to enter into God's rest.

What was best for my father would cause impact on his wife and children. We would grieve. We would struggle. But all the while our Heavenly Father was there seeking to mend our broken hearts. He was there to look out for the widow and the fatherless.

God is there for you. Right now, Jesus is working to prepare the most glorious place for those who love Him. In this life there will be pain. But take heart because one day you will be free from it thanks to Jesus.

Second,

Lasting hope is found in Jesus.

There is always hope in Jesus. A leper had no hope of healing. But an encounter with Jesus changed that. He was completely healed and able to go back into society.

A widow was going to bury her son. But an encounter with Jesus and the son is brought back to life and given back to his mother.

A tax collector with a terrible reputation and hated by many has an encounter with Jesus and he is forgiven and given a better life than before. He became one of the 12 Disciples and was entrusted to write one of the four gospels. Matthew's life was never the same after that encounter with Jesus.

Jesus can resurrect you to a new life. He can remove your shame. He can give you dignity. He can restore your name. 2 Corinthians 5:17 (The Message), "Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it!?"

How about you? Have you had an encounter with Jesus? Have you experienced His cleansing? Has He changed the trajectory of your life? Has He given you hope when you were once hopeless?

If you have not, He desires that encounter with you. Are you willing to connect with Him?

Lasting hope is only found in Jesus.

Let's pray

o.b.g.