

The unfolding of your words gives light.

## To Seek and to Save

### An Exposition of the Gospel of Luke

<sup>11</sup>Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain<sup>a</sup>; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd<sup>b</sup>. <sup>12</sup>Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her<sup>c</sup>. <sup>13</sup>When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep<sup>d</sup>.” <sup>14</sup>And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt<sup>e</sup>. And

<sup>a</sup> 7:11 **Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain.** Nain was located less than twenty miles from Capernaum. It was (and still is) on the northern slope of Mt. Moreh, the hill where Saul and Jonathan died. Only two miles over the hill to the south is Shunem where Elisha restored a different child to his mother.

<sup>b</sup> 7:11 **His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd.** It is understandable that crowd sizes were on the increase. This is the height of Jesus’ miraculous ministry, as he told later John in prison (7:18-30).

<sup>c</sup> 7:12 **as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her.** Widows and orphans are the classes of people considered the most vulnerable in Scripture. A woman without the provision of a husband in first century culture would have been dependent on her family. This son—Luke points out he was her *only* son—would have been her sole means of financial support. The grief of her loss was compounded by the prospect of extreme poverty.

We can assume the large procession was headed for a burial ground outside the city and may have included hired mourners

<sup>d</sup> 7:13 **When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.”** This description of Jesus shows His tenderness toward those who hurt. Luke uses the word for “felt compassion” that is used 24 times in 12 verses of the New Testament. It is used of the feeling Jesus got when He saw hungry, sick and shepherdless people (Mark 8:2; Matthew 14:14; 9:36). Jesus uses it of both the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and the father of the prodigal son (Luke 16).

The language of this verse argues clearly for the true humanity of the Son of God. The word translated “felt compassion” vividly pictures Jesus’ insides moving. You have likely experienced this when you see great pain in someone else. Your body responds to the thoughts in your heart. That’s why you shudder at the thought of scary things, cry at sad things, become nauseous at disgusting things and get ulcers in your stomach from worrying too much.

Note that He felt compassion for the mother. No mention is made that He felt compassion for the son.

<sup>e</sup> 7:14 **He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt.** To this day it is socially unacceptable to stop a funeral procession. Jesus did it, but when He did it ceased being a funeral procession.

The word translated “touched” indicates more than a brush against the coffin. It is the word often used of Jesus’ healing touch. This may have brought ceremonial defilement on Jesus according to the interpretation of the rabbis. Ceremonial defilement was not the same as moral defilement, but it did keep Jews from participating in worship until ritual cleansing and a prescribed time passed. Scripture shows that in Israel it was not only the dead body that brought ceremonial defilement, but the things connected with death:

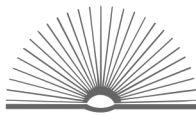
The one who touches the corpse of any person shall be unclean for seven days. That one shall purify himself from uncleanness with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and then he will be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. Anyone who touches a corpse, the body of a man who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD; and

The Gospel of Luke  
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He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise<sup>a</sup>!”<sup>15</sup> The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother<sup>b</sup>.<sup>16</sup> Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God<sup>c</sup>, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and, “God has visited His people!”<sup>17</sup> This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district<sup>d,e</sup>.

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that person shall be cut off from Israel. Because the water for impurity was not sprinkled on him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is still on him. This is the law when a man dies in a tent: everyone who comes into the tent and everyone who is in the tent shall be unclean for seven days. Every open vessel, which has no covering tied down on it, shall be unclean. Also, anyone who in the open field touches one who has been slain with a sword or who has died naturally, or a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean for seven days. Then for the unclean person they shall take some of the ashes of the burnt purification from sin and flowing water shall be added to them in a vessel. A clean person shall take hyssop and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it on the tent and on all the furnishings and on the persons who were there, and on the one who touched the bone or the one slain or the one dying naturally or the grave. Then the clean person shall sprinkle on the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify him from uncleanness, and he shall wash his clothes and bathe himself in water and shall be clean by evening. But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself from uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD; the water for impurity has not been sprinkled on him, he is unclean. Numbers 19:11-20

<sup>a</sup> 7:14 **“Young man, I say to you, arise!”** Look at John 11:43 for a similar command to Lazarus. The voice of Jesus is the only thing that can call the world into existence, call the dead to life and call a sinner from his spiritual grave (Ephesians 2:1-10).

<sup>b</sup> 7:15 **The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother.** See 2 Kings 4:36-37 for this picture of restoration. Again, the focus of Jesus’ ministry was the mother, not the son.

<sup>c</sup> 7:16 **Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God.** The word translated “gripped” is a simple word that shows us the fear “took” them. This is the same kind of fear that the disciples experienced when they saw Jesus walking on the water during a storm (Matthew 14:22-27). Like watching a powerful storm (see Psalm 29), the display of God’s power prompts fear and awe at the same time.

<sup>d</sup> 7:17 **This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.** John, locked away in prison, was missing the true greatest show on earth. But everyone else knew they could not deny the demonstrations of the power of God happening before their eyes and confirming Jesus’ claims to divinity.

<sup>e</sup> 7:11-17 The Lord knew loss and He knew want during His earthly ministry. The writer of Hebrews says,

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. Hebrews 4:15

This is one of many gospel texts that reveal the heart of Jesus. Be thankful God has left us with these records or you might conclude otherwise when times are hard. Here are facts from this text that you need to tuck away so you never forget that Jesus is approachable for those in need:

1. You can trust His timing. If you had been a fan of Jesus watching these events on television you might have seen the funeral procession leaving the town and Jesus approaching the town, and worried that He might not make it before they put the coffin in the ground. *Will He make it in time?* That is no different than the hard things that are disturbing you right now. His timing is always perfect.
2. You can know He will behave tenderly toward the weak. That does not mean He will always give you what you want when you are weak, but it does mean that He identifies Himself with sufferers. He knows how rejection feels and He knows what it is like to suffer for sin—your sin, not His.
3. You can run to Him when His works most disturb you. He could have prevented the lad’s death just as He could have prevented the death of Lazarus. But that’s not His style. As Puritan Thomas Watson said in his *Body of Divinity*:

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In the deliverance of the church, it is limiting God, either to set him a time, or prescribe him a method for deliverance. God will deliver Sion, but he will be left to his own liberty; he will not be tied to a place, to a time, or to an instrument, which were to limit him, and then he should not be infinite. God will go his own way, he will pose and nonplus reason, he will save in such a way as we think would destroy. Now he acts like himself, like an infinite wonder-working God. (p. 55)

The Lord Jesus always acts in keeping with His character, but He often creates confusion among His people on the way. His works that we perceive as most threatening end up promoting awe rather than terror.

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