

Sermon 38: The Mystery of Divine Providence: Luke 7:11-19

Text: Luke 7:11-9 “And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumor of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about. And the disciples of John showed him all these things. And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?”

Summary: The resurrection of a widow’s only son serves as a powerful testimony to the mystery of divine providence and the kindness of God’s ways to point us to Himself.

Proposition: God wants us to rest in His providence as He shapes us into Christ’s image.

Introduction: The connection between Christ’s ministry and Israel’s two most notable prophets Elijah and Elisha.

- **Christ in Nazareth: Luke 4:18-28** “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord....This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son...And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a

city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath...”

- **His Two examples:**
 - **Elijah and the widow of Zarephath: 1 Kings 17**
 - **Luke 7 the widow at Nain**
 - **Elisha and Naaman the leper: 2 Kings 5**
 - **Luke 7 the Roman Centurion**
- **There is another notable connection: Elisha and the Shunammite woman (this is basically the same community 800 years later): 2 Kings 4**
- **The point:**
 - The gospel is a message for all kinds of people.
 - When the people most likely to accept it don't, He still makes His power and grace known.
 - The heart of the gospel is His compassion and love for broken people who cannot come to Him apart from His work on their behalf.
- **These events were meant to visibly demonstrate God's providence and the kind ways He governs circumstances for His glory and our ultimate good.**

Truth 1: God mysteriously governs the natural course of life: 7:11-12

“And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her...”

- **Four Important Descriptions:**
 - **Ordinary:** “He went into a city called Nain...”
 - Jesus was traveling the ordinary route from Galilee to the south.
 - The people traveling with him would have never predicted the significance of what they were about to witness.
 - **Visible:** “Many of his disciples went with him, and much people...”

- **Timely:** “Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out...”
- **Tragic:** “The only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her...”
 - She was a widow, which meant she had experienced intense grief.
 - She was a widow which made her very vulnerable.
 - She lost her only son which further intensified her grief and vulnerability.
- **From a human perspective:** The story is tragic and a painful reminder to the universality of human suffering and death.
- **There is another side:** God’s providence guides the human experience.
- **God’s providence in the ordinary is a major Biblical theme:**
 - **Daniel 4:35** “He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”
 - **Romans 11:33-36** “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen...”
 - **Isaiah 55:8-9** “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.
 - **Ecclesiastes 3:11** “He hath made everything beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end...”
 - **Romans 8:28** “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose...”
- **He works mysteriously, meaning that what the what and why are not fully revealed.**

- **We aren't entitled to get the answers, nor are we fully capable of processing everything God does:**
 - **Proverbs 25:2** "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter..."
 - **Job 40:1-4** "Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? he that reproveth God, let him answer it. Then Job answered the LORD, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further..."
 - **Job 42:1-3** "I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not..."

Truth 2: This governance is intended to point us to an objective understanding of His nature: 7:14-15 "And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother..."

- **There are two basic reasons Christ raised this young man:**
 - He raised Him out of compassion:
 - He raised Him to leave a visible, objective witness to His true nature.
- **The scriptures tell us who God is:**
 - Our understanding must begin with His **objective self-revelation in Scripture**.
 - Scripture continually presents Him **personally in history**.
 - God wants our knowledge of Him to become **experiential**:
Psalm 48:8 "As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts..."
- **Questions:**
 - How does He move us from an academic to a personal experiential knowledge?
 - How does He move us from a shallow, casual relationship to one with rich depth?

- How does He shape us into the image of Christ?
- How does He pull down the idols of our hearts and turn it to Himself?
- How does He make us consider the emptiness of this fallen world and the glories of our eternal inheritance?
- **God wants us to know Him and experience His transforming power.**

Truth 3: His providence compels a human response: 7:16-17 “And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumor of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about...”

- **When God visibly interrupts the ordinary course of events it forces us to face that eruption:**
- **That’s why He directs, allows, and causes circumstances:** He is calling us to consider.
- **He doesn’t act without purpose: Ecclesiastes 3:1** “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...”
 - **Everything, season, time, and purpose:** Every part of our human experience has the potential to be used by God for some good.
 - Good and bad...Sweet and bitter...humbling and uplifting...
- **There is no moment in our human experience that can thwart God’s purposes of revealing Himself and shaping us into His image.**
- **This event was no different:**
 - **A grieving mother was comforted and overwhelmed by God’s grace.**
 - **The crowd was sobered:** “And there came a fear on all...”
 - **People saw God’s power on display:** “And they glorified God...”
 - **They realized He was actively at work in their midst:** “A great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people...”

- **People couldn't help but talk about what they saw:** “And this rumor of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about...”

Truth 4: His word must inform our response: 7:18-19 “And the disciples of John shewed him of all these things. And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?”

- **They needed God's objective revelation to clarify what they saw:**
- **Experience without Scripture to shape how we process those experiences will lead to misunderstanding and potentially devastating conclusions.**
- **They didn't understand who Jesus was fully without additional information:**
 - Just seeing something significant isn't enough.
 - They knew Jesus did something remarkable, but they needed clarification to understand what the sign was authenticating.
 - Even John needed Christ to reaffirm that what He had preached was true.
 - Sometimes we will go through experiences that leave more questions than answers, and how we seek those answers is extremely important.
 - We must go back to what is objectively true and start there as the foundation for processing our experience.

Application: We can affirm on the authority of scripture that He personally and actively rules.

- He wants us to move from an academic to a personal, experiential knowledge of Him.
- He wants to move us from a shallow, casual relationship to one with rich depth.
- He wants to shape us into the image of Christ.
- How does He pull down the idols of our hearts and turn it to Himself?
- He wants us to consider the emptiness of this fallen world and the glories of our eternal inheritance.

Stephen Charnock:

“Nothing is acted in the world without the will of God. His will either commands or permits...Nothing can subsist without God’s care and power. Like a skillful pilot, he sits at the helm and steers the world in what course it should sail. In the least moment, if God should withhold the influence of His providence, we would melt into nothing...Is it not high presumption for ignorance to judge God’s proceedings...When the whole connection of there end is unraveled, they appear highly beautiful, and discover a glorious wisdom and righteousness...It is certain, God righteously orders His providence...”