

The Forgotten Beatitude

Luke 7:11–35 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: I am told that there is an adventure that can be found on the bucket list of every outdoorsman in California...to hike from Mount Whitney's top to Death Valley's floor in a single day.

The view from the top of Mount Whitney is breathtaking. It is the highest point in the continental United States at some 14,495 ft. To the north, as far as you can see, the Sierra Nevada; to the East, the mirages of the hot Mohave Desert. On a clear day, you can see over 100 miles. Eighty miles to the southeast, you could see Death Valley, the lowest point in the continental United States, some 276 ft below sea level.

What a contrast; just 80 miles away. One place is on top of the world...the other at the bottom. At the top of Mt. Whitney, it is perpetually cool and refreshing, and at the bottom of Death Valley, it is relentlessly hot.

Imagine experiencing both in a single hike.

Our text today takes us on a similar journey. It takes us from the pinnacle of joy and celebration to the very pit of despair...from the *pinnacle* to the *prison*. As such, our text today is **holy ground**.

I've never cared a great deal about the emotions of those who are easily triggered. But I must warn you today that the Holy Spirit, through this text, will take you on a very personal journey.

- He will remind you of those mountains that did not move.
- He will stand with you at the banks of seas that did not divide.
- He will lay a hand on the stones that were not rolled away.

And He will ask, "Do you still trust Me?"

CONTEXT: Last week, we looked at the marvelous faith of the **Roman Centurion** who sent word to Jesus saying, "I am not worthy for you to visit me, but simply say the word and my servant will be healed." To which our Lord declared, "I have not seen such faith in all of Israel."

Today, another man of faith will send messengers to Jesus, but not to declare his great **faith**, but rather to confess his honest **doubt**.

The story picks up with two great crowds of people entering a town called **Nain** at the same time.

- From one direction, we see a crowd of mourners in a funeral procession. A young man has recently died, the only son of his widowed mother.

See it now through the eye of faith - her broken heart, tears, grief, and worry about what the future may hold for a lady with neither husband nor son. See those following with her, trying to reassure her, seeking to comfort her. But she was experiencing what no mother should: the premature death of her only son.

- Now, from the other direction, a very different crowd. Jesus led this one. They have just witnessed the miraculous healing of the centurion's servant. Could this Jesus of Nazareth be the Messiah of Israel? It was looking that way - even death obeyed his voice.

Oh, to paint these two very different crowds of people. Tears and sadness mark the one, delight and confidence the other.

All of Heaven is watching from afar, waiting to see what would happen when sorrow encounters the Savior.

We read in verse 13...

TEXT: Luke 7:11–35 (ESV)

¹³ And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her

Note that our King is not some sort of artificial intelligence, cold and void of empathy, unmoved by the struggle of his image-bearers.

No, this is a sovereign who can relate. He knows what it is to feel pain. He knows what it is to suffer loss. He understands the deep wounds of betrayal.

And of all people, he holds a peculiar **sympathy for the widow**. What was it about this widow of Nain? Her husband is gone, now her son... I have to wonder if Jesus saw her and thought of **his own earthly mother**. By this time, she was a widow and would soon weep over the loss of her firstborn.

Yes, our Lord has a special place in his heart for the widow. That is why he strictly charged the church through the Apostle James that pure and undefiled religion looks after the widow and orphan in their distress.

Yet, before the church is called to care for the widow, her children are charged to HONOR their mother and care for her, not to burden God's people. ***It is a great sin in adulthood to fail to care for the one who looked after you in childhood.***

But this widow had no one to look after her. Now, here she was burying her son. Jesus couldn't resist...

13b. 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.

This is one of three occasions that Jesus raised the dead in the Gospels. The others are Jairus' daughter (8:40-56), and Lazarus (John 11:1-44).

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.

NOW, there you have the spiritual view from atop Mount Whitney - the fresh air of faith, the crisp, clear vision of all that lies before you. The mount top experience is so good. If you are blessed with such experiences, enjoy them fully, but understand they are NOT universal.

As the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to record the miracle for the widow at Nain, He also quickly turns our attention to what we might call the **death valley of the soul**.

You see, meanwhile.... John the Baptist is languishing in Herod's prison, facing his impending death. What has he done? He has spoken truth to power. He has called Herod Antipas to repent of taking his brother Phillip's wife.

INCIDENTALLY - However, you may feel about the separation of church and state, recognize that every King of Israel had a Prophet speaking truth to him, even outside the nation of Israel.

- The King of Ninevah had Jonah.
- The King of Babylon had Daniel.
- Saul had Samuel.
- David had Nathan.

The only one who had no Prophet among his courtiers was Solomon - all accelerator and no brake, no one to call him to account. And it was through Solomon that idolatry had a foothold in Israel.

Well, Herod had John. John would wander up from the wilderness occasionally and call a spade a spade. And Herod respected him for it. But he couldn't let it continue. So, he has John arrested. On what charge? Telling the truth, I suppose. See John there, in chains. His disciples visit him and recount the rumors concerning his cousin Jesus of Nazareth.

Rabbi, they speak of Him healing the sick, calming the storm, even raising the dead. This must be the Messiah of Israel. Yet there John sat, despite his faithful ministry to Jesus, just days away from his execution.

He had to wonder why. If Jesus can do all of these things for people he hardly knows, why would he not rescue me?

We've all been there. **The real problem is NOT *doubt exactly*...** but rather faith. You see, we are convinced that Jesus can deliver us, yet He is not. Why?

You've been there...a job in jeopardy, a child in pain, a marriage that isn't getting better. You know the Lord could snap a finger and make all the pain go away... but he doesn't always. There you sit, in a Death Valley experience. If you respond rightly, you are on the precipice of spiritual growth beyond all you would ever dream. What does a proper response look like?

1. The Saint's Frustration

¹⁸ The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, ¹⁹ calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" ²⁰ And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" ²¹ In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.

The first thing John did was that he took his honest frustration to the only one who could help - Jesus Himself.

- Like David, that sweet Psalmist of Israel - when he would write line upon line, questioning God, charging God, pouring out his soul to the Almighty... until that moment of breakthrough... when the **minor key turns major, and faith begins to arise.**

You see, it is not helpful to edit your prayers too much when you sit in Death Valley. Just pray what you feel. God can take it.

If you doubt, tell Him you doubt. If you are angry, tell Him you are angry. Take the deepest pain and darkest emotions you struggle with to Him.

- The Great Physician must see the wound if He is to heal it.

You ask, "But what will God think if He knows how I truly feel?". He already knows! ***Has it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God?***

- He knew how you would feel when He sovereignly declared your existence before the foundation of the world.
- He knew how you would feel when he knitted you in your mother's womb.
- He saw this day coming from afar.

- He knew how you would feel when he died for you on the cross. He knew how you would feel when he reached down, convicted you of your sin, and gently drew you to give yourself to Him.

This new situation changes NOTHING about His feelings toward you or His commitment to you.

But if you are to make progress, you must let him hear your frustration, not to educate Him but to edify you.

The Saint's Frustration...

2. The Savior's Response

²² And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."²³ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

In other words, tell John that I have the power to do anything I will. I can open blind eyes, I can open deaf ears, I can even raise the dead... and I'm still not going to break him out of prison.

And BLESSED is the one who is OK with that.

- Blessed is the one who says with JOB - the Lord gives and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.
- Blessed is the one who says with JOSEPH - you meant it for evil, but the Lord meant it for good.

Blessed is the man or woman who understands that God uses sorrow and pain as much as He uses blessing and provision to shape his saints. In fact, your faith will grow far more through suffering than blessing.

ILLUSTRATION: I heard about a lady who had become terribly crippled due to arthritis. She came to her Pastor trembling and weeping and said, "Pastor, why has God made me like this?" The Pastor wisely replied, **"God hasn't made you - HE IS MAKING YOU"**.

ILLUSTRATION: Peach Business

I read about a young Christian trying to get into the peach growing business. He had worked hard and invested everything he had in a peach orchard, which had blossomed beautifully. But then a frost came, and it destroyed his entire crop. He didn't go to church the next Sunday, the next, or the next. So, his pastor went to see him to find out why. The young fellow said, "Pastor, I'm not coming to church anymore. Do you think I can worship a God who cares so little for me that he would let a frost kill all of my peaches?" The preacher replied kindly and wisely, "Son, God loves you better than he

loves your peaches. You see, God understands that while peaches can grow without frost, Christians cannot grow without trials. **God is not in the business of growing peaches. He's in the business of growing Christians."**

I DON'T KNOW what storm you are facing.

- Marriage?
- Children?
- Lost some friends?
- Out of work?
- Got a bad report from the Doctor?
- Someone at the church disappoint you?

Friend - don't miss what God is doing IN you in the midst of the storm.

The Saint's Frustration, the Savior's Response...

3. The Sovereign's Testimony

²⁴ When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John:

Oh, here it comes, that divine chastisement that John rightly deserved. Jesus Christ Himself would hold John as a bad example, one they should avoid, one they should pray for and pity... or would He?

24b. "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ²⁵ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. ²⁶ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ²⁷ This is he of whom it is written, " 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' ²⁸ I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

In the midst of John's darkest moment - Jesus remained faithful.

As Paul told Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:13 (ESV)** ¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.

You see, your salvation does not rest in the size of your faith but rather in the size of your Savior.

Don't give up, and don't give in; "He who began the good work in you will be faithful to complete it."

Note the following two verses are in black if you have a red-letter edition. This is Luke's commentary...

²⁹ (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)

So, we see three groups of people in our text:

1. One group rejoiced over the resurrecting power of Jesus as he raised the widow's son.
2. Another rejoicing over the faithfulness of Jesus, even when we struggle and doubt.
3. And another cold, calculating, and despondent... having rejected God's purpose for themselves.

In these last four verses, Jesus speaks to those who have rejected God's purpose for themselves...

³¹ "To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, " "We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep." ³³ For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' ³⁴ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' ³⁵ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

He says some of you are like spoiled kids. No matter what you give them they don't like it. But you never understand the problem is NOT the fact that John didn't drink, or that Jesus did drink...

The problem isn't this or that about the church.

The problem isn't the preacher.

The problem isn't the denomination.

The only reason you haven't accepted God's purpose for your life is YOU.

You have been offended by Him, and you suffer as a result.

²³ **And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.**"