

“From Sorrow to Fear”

(Luke 7:11-17)

Introduction

- There is a temptation before us, especially for those of us who have been Christians for a long time, to be unimpressed or unamazed by the miracles of Jesus. This “miracle fatigue” occurs when we have heard (or read) the stories of Jesus’ miracles so many times that we lose our wonder and awe of what He did – and even of who He is. If we are not careful, the biblical stories of Jesus’ miraculous powers can become “ordinary” to us and not “extraordinary.” The Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus’ miracles – and this is not by accident. The writers, superintended by the Holy Spirit of God (2Tim.3:16; 2Pet.1:21), intentionally included these miracles to give us convincing proof that Jesus is the Christ, the one and only Son of God.

Throughout his Gospel, Luke highlighted Jesus’ divine authority – and the incarnate Son of God – over nature, disease, deformity, disability, demons, and even death. As we saw last week, Jesus often left people amazed by what He said and did (even those who hated him). The miracles Jesus performed were, among other things, literally extraordinary.

Luke 5:26 [when Jesus forgave and healed the paralytic] ~ “And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, ‘We have seen extraordinary things [*paradoxos*] today.’”

Mark 2:12 ~ “And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’”

Matt 9:33 [when Jesus demon-possessed man who was mute] ~ “And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled, saying, ‘Never was anything like this seen in Israel.’”

- The crowds were often confounded (dumfounded) by Jesus and, after witnessing His miraculous powers, they were often afraid of Him. This was never more true than when Jesus showed His divine authority over death itself. The Gospels record three different times when Jesus raised the dead: Lazarus (Jn.11:38-44), Jairus’ daughter (Matt.9:18-26; Mk.5:21-43; Lk.8:40-56), and – the passage before us this morning – the widow’s son (recorded only in Luke’s Gospel, and the first occurrence in the gospels of Jesus raising the dead):

Luke 7:11-17 ~ “Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. ¹²As 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. ¹³And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’ ¹⁴Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ ¹⁵And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has arisen among us!’ and ‘God has visited his people!’ ¹⁷And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.”

- This biblical narrative unfolds in five scenes.

1. The Entourage (vs.11)

- This narrative took place during the second year of Jesus’ three-year public ministry. This has been known as “the year of popularity”, as Jesus performed many miracles throughout Palestine and specifically in Galilee. It was during this time that people flocked to Jesus from all over. At times, the crowds numbered in the hundreds and thousands – and even tens of thousands (Matt.14:21 [Lk.9:14]; Matt.15:38). Intense opposition would arise, from the Jewish leaders, partly due to the fact that Jesus’ popularity was so immense.

- *“Soon [after]”* (vs.11), Jesus healed the centurion’s servant (Lk.7:1) *“he went to a town called Nain”* (vs.11). Nain was not a city, and it was barely a town. Located in southwestern Galilee – about twenty miles southwest of Capernaum and six miles southeast of Nazareth – Nain, mentioned only here in the Bible, is most (only) famous for being the place where Jesus raised the dead boy.
- Luke recorded that those who went with Jesus were *“his disciples and a great crowd”* (vs.11). The word *“disciples”* (*mathētēs*) is not limited to the apostles, but certainly included the twelve apostles, and the phrase *“a great crowd”* (*polys ochlos*) is not specific number. We do know that this exact phrase was used to describe the multitude of people who gathered to hear Jesus’ “Sermon on the Plateau” (Lk.6:17), and used to describe the tens of thousands of people (Matt.14:14) who witnessed Jesus miraculously feed the *“five thousand men, besides women and children”* (Matt.14:21). It is also the phrase used to describe the worshipers in heaven:

Rev 7:9-11 ~ “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude [*polys ochlos*] that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Rev.19:1, 6).

Rev 19:1 ~ “After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude [*polys ochlos*] in heaven, crying out ...”

Rev 19:6 ~ “Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude [*polys ochlos*], like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out ...”

- While cannot be sure of the size of Jesus’ entourage – numbering in the dozens, or hundreds, or thousands – we can be assured that the people of Nain were not expecting, or prepared for, their arrival.

2. The Processional (vs.12)

- The fact that there was a *“gate of the town”* (vs.12) was more for decorative reasons than for military defense purposes. When Jesus and His entourage entered the town, they came upon a funeral procession: *“As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out”* (vs.12). In New Testament times, funerals occurred a day or a few days after a person has died (not weeks or months afterward like many funerals today). The funeral service had ended, and the “pallbearers” (vs.14) were taking the body to the burial site on a *“bier”* (*soros*; stretcher or open coffin) outside of the town (presumably to be buried next to his father).

The deceased person is described as *“a man”* and *“the only son of his mother”* who *“was a widow”* (vs.12). Jesus called him *“Young man”* (vs.14; *neaniskos*) which indicates that he was under the age of forty. This death was obviously devastating to the mother, who was now “an orphaned parent” and (in that culture) possibly having no male protector or provider. Having already lost her husband, the widow’s grief is inexpressible. This was the “saddest of all sad scenes in Jewish family life” (John

MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Luke*; 7:12).

- The fact that this was the death of an *“only son”* (*monogenēs*; only child) is a detail that Luke often mentioned (Lk.8:42; 9:38), and is the same word used to describe Jesus as the *“only [begotten] Son”* of God (Jn.1:14; 3:3:16, 18). It is important to note that this “one and only son” would be raised to life by the “One and Only Son of God.” The tragic story of the death of the widow’s only son, highlights the sacrifice God made by sacrificing His one and only Son for us (Jn.3:16; Rom.5:8; 8:32; 1Jn.4:9).
- This death also seemed devastating to the people of Nain – no doubt family and friends – for *“a considerable crowd from the town was with her”* (vs.12; *“considerable crowd”* [*hikanos ochlos*]). The whole town, and possibly more, gathered in sorrow for and in support of this widow. Typically, such a processional would involve “professional mourners”, leaving us to imagine the size of the crowd and the volume of the pain and sorrow.

✓Illust: “The coffin was surrounded by professional mourners who were leading a large, wailing crowd with flutes, cymbals, and frenzied cries. The cries were especially deafening because of the loud morning associated with the death of an only child” (R. Kent Hughes; *Preaching the Word: Luke*; 7:11-17; p.262).

Mark 5:38-43 ~ “They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion [*thorybos*], people weeping and wailing loudly [*polys*]. ³⁹And when he had entered, he said to them, ‘Why are you making a commotion [*thorybeō*] and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping.’ ⁴⁰And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child’s father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. ⁴¹Taking her by the hand he said to her, ‘Talitha cumi,’ which means, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise.’ ⁴²And immediately the girl got up and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. ⁴³And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.” (also Matt.9:23-26; Lk.8:51-56)

3. The Miracle (vs.13-15)

➤I think it is safe to say that no one expected Jesus, and the large crowd following Him, to interrupt this funeral processional – no one except Jesus, of course. The arrival of Jesus’ entourage alone would have undoubtedly (indirectly, passively) interrupted the processional. But Jesus said and did the unthinkable – He intentionally (perhaps offensively) interrupted the processional.

A. Jesus’ compassion ~ His words to a grieving mother (vs.13)

First, Jesus said to the widow, “*Do no weep*” (vs.13; lit. “weep not”) which, as an imperative verb, was possibly a strong exhortation. Can you imagine? (“Who does this man think he is?”) Her only son had recently died, the funeral service for him just ended, and they are making their way to bury him in the cemetery likely next to his father, and Jesus told her to “stop crying”?

Thankfully, we are told why and how Jesus said these words: “*he had compassion on her*” (vs.13). The Greek word translated “*he had compassion*” (*splanchnizomai*) means “to be moved with pity.” It literally refers to one’s intestinal parts, and is figuratively used to describe a “gut-wrenching”, “heartfelt”, or visceral reaction. This was no shallow or lighthearted sympathy.

Jesus did not chide this widow for her grief, nor did He rebuke her for crying. For weeping is not a sin, and Christian joy is not necessarily the absence of sorrow or tears (Jn.11:35; Rom.12:15; 1Thess.4:13). His words were meant to comfort her, in preparation for what He was about to do.

Luke 8:49-50 ~ “While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler’s house came and said, ‘Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the Teacher any more.’ ⁵⁰But Jesus on hearing this answered him, ‘Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.’”

We must not ignore or think lightly of the Lord’s compassion. While we love to expound on the greatness of Jesus (His divine power and authority) as the Son of God, we must not eclipse the reality of His character (others love to expound on the compassion of Jesus and diminish His divine power and authority). Jesus was not just a miracle worker, and His miracles were not merely to showcase His divine authority. They also demonstrated His love and mercy. Jesus was no calloused crusader, heartlessly carrying out His assignment from God. He loves those He came to save, and is a Savior filled with compassion for those who are hurting and lost.

✓Illust: “Now I think we unduly limit the meaning of our Lord’s miracles when we regard them as specially intended to authenticate His claims. They are not merely the evidences of revelation; they are themselves a large part of revelation. ... We have Him here revealed to us as the compassionate Drier of all tears; the life-giving Antagonist of death; and as the Re-uniter of parted hearts” (Alexander MacLaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture: Luke* ; 7:13-15).

The gospels are replete with references to Jesus' compassion (Matt.9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mk.1:41). Make no mistake, Jesus (God) is just as compassionate today (Heb.13:8). Just as God's love and mercy do not contend with or erase His wrath and righteousness, so too God's wrath and righteousness do not contend with or erase His love and mercy. The fact that God is just does not make Him merciless, and the fact that God is merciful does not make Him unjust. God is abounding in love for the unloved; He is abounding in compassion for the hurting; He is abounding in mercy for the suffering; He is abounding in grace for the sinner.

Ps 103:8-13 ~ "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ⁹He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. ¹⁰He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; ¹²as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. ¹³As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him."

Heb 2:17-18 ~ "Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

Heb 4:15-16 ~ "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Jesus was not saying to the grieving mother, "Chin up!" or "Cheer up!" or "Look on the bright side!" Perhaps moved to His own tears, Jesus' gentle exhortation to the mother was in effect saying to her: "Look at what I am going to do!"

B. Jesus' power ~ His words to a dead son (vs.14-15)

If what Jesus said was unexpected and potentially offensive, what He did was even more so: *"Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still"* (vs.14). Again, can you imagine? What a shocking, and potentially (ceremonially) defiling, action (Num.19:11, 16). Jesus effectively stopped the entire funeral ceremony. One can almost hear the gasp from the crowd when He *"came up and touched the bier"* (vs.14). No wonder *"the bearers stood still"* (vs.14). It is likely that Jesus touched the bier indicating to the bearers that they need to stop.

Remember, Jesus was not a family member nor even an invited guest. He was essentially a stranger – who showed up unannounced, exhorted the grieving mother, and placed His hand on her recently dead son's coffin. But Jesus was no ordinary stranger, and His touch was no ordinary touch.

Luke 5:12-17 ~ "While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.' ¹³And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean.' And immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴And he charged him to tell no one, but 'go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to them.' ¹⁵But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. ¹⁶But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray."

Mark 1:41 ~ "Moved with pity [*splanchnizomai*], he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, 'I will; be clean.'"

Mark 1:45 ~ “But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter.”

Jesus did not touch the leper in order to heal him, for He can heal simply by the authority of His divine will (Matt.8:13 [Lk.7:10]; Jn.11:43). He touched the leper because it was socially and religiously unacceptable to touch a leper. Jesus’ touch was an expression of love and compassion (see Lk.4:40; 7:14; 13:13; 22:51; Mk.6:5).

When Jesus “*touched the bier*” (vs.14), He broke ceremonial and social norms. The uninvited guest was not the center of attention. Touching the dead man’s coffin, as it was being brought to the cemetery for burial, brought the procession to a screeching halt. Whether the people were held in stunned silence or moved to murmuring outrage we simply do not know. But this is arguably not even the most shocking thing Jesus did that day!

After gently exhorting the mother, Jesus exhorted the dead son: “*Young man, I say to you, arise*” (vs.14; “arise” [aor., pass., imper.]). Again, can you imagine? Jesus has already (presumably) showed up unannounced (a crowd with Him). Jesus has already exhorted the grieving mother and widow. Jesus has already touched the coffin, stopping the entire funeral procession. All within a matter of moments! And now He audibly commanded the dead man to come to life. The One who is “*the resurrection and the life*” (Jn.11:25) raised this man to life!

Luke 8:54 ~ “But taking her by the hand he called, saying, ‘Child, arise.’” [“arise” (imp., vb.)]

John 11:43 ~ “When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out.’” [“come” (interj.)]

As shocking as all this would be – “Who does this man think he is?” – it would have to be even more shocking to see “*the dead man [sit] up*” (vs.15) and to hear him “*[begin] to speak*” (vs.15). At the will of the Son of God, the dead man was filled with life – his eyes opened, his lungs filled with air, his heart began to beat, his brain was active again, all his organs functioned normally, and his strength was restored. In the case of Lazarus, who had been dead four days and who was already buried (Jn.11:39), Jesus instantly stopped and completely reversed the process of decomposition.

Then, in one of the most subtle verses in all of Scripture, we read that “*Jesus gave him to his mother*” (vs.15). What a reunion that would have been (like Jairus’ daughter, and Lazarus)! A mixture of shock and joy, disbelief and relief, exhaustion and exhilaration.

- All the resurrection stories in Scripture pale in comparison to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For every other person was raised to life by someone else (where Jesus rose Himself from the dead; Jn.2:19; 10:17-18), and every other person would die again (where Jesus ascended to heaven, never to die again; Acts 1:9-11; Eph.1:20; Rom.8:34; Heb.7:27; 10:10). Furthermore, every other death and resurrection was merely a physical reality, where the death of Jesus Christ was a sacrificial and substitutionary death for sinners (Is.53:4-6; 2Cor.5:21). Jesus’ death and resurrection conquered sin and death forever, for all those who receive Him as Lord and Savior.

Rom 4:25 ~ “[Jesus] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

1 Peter 1:3-5 ~ “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Rom 8:34 ~ “Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.”

4. The Response (vs.16)

- Among all the surprises that occurred in this narrative, the fact that there was a dramatic response from the crowd(s) is not one of them. The emotional swing they just experienced is unimaginable. One moment they are proceeding to a graveside to bury a young man, the only son of a widow, and the next moment they are watching him and his mother reunited.

What were they thinking? What were they feeling? Scripture tells us: *“Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has arisen among us!’ and ‘God has visited his people!’”* (vs.16).

A. Reaction: Fear and praise (vs.16)

The people were gripped (*“seized”*; *lambanō*) with *“fear”* (vs.16). Jesus’ miracle had traumatized them to the core. Again, we are left to our imagination. The word *“fear”* (*phobos*) can mean terror or awe, and sometimes both. This was not an uncommon response to the miracles of Jesus. It is the realization that you have just witnessed and/or experienced the power and presence of God (e.g., Lk.5:26; 8:37).

Luke 5:26 [when Jesus forgave and healed the paralytic] ~ “And amazement seized [*ekstasis lambanō*] them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe [*pimplēmi phobos*], saying, ‘We have seen extraordinary things today.’”

Luke 8:37 [when healed the man with a “legion” of demons] ~ “Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked him to depart from them, for they were seized with great fear [*synechō megas phobos*]. So he got into the boat and returned.”

Thankfully, the people realized that this was a supernatural (miracle) of God, and *“they glorified”* Him (Lk.5:26; 9:43; 13:13; 17:15; 18:43; 23:47).

B. Confession: Prophet and God (vs.16)

Unfortunately, however, they did not glorify Jesus as God. While they recognized that God was working through Jesus, they failed to that Jesus is God. They exclaimed, *“A great prophet has arisen among us!”* (vs.16), no doubt remembering stories they heard about Elijah raising the widow’s dead son and concluding that he was *“a man of God”* (1Kngs.17:17-24). This is not too unlike Nicodemus acknowledging Jesus as *“a teacher from God”* (Jn.3:2), or people today admitting that Jesus was a godly man and good teacher.

Luke 9:18-20 ~ “Now it happened that as he was praying alone, the disciples were with him. And he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say that I am?’ ¹⁹And they answered, ‘John the Baptist. But others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the prophets of old has risen.’ ²⁰Then he said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ And Peter answered, ‘The Christ of God.’”

To be sure, Jesus is *“a great prophet”* (vs.16) – He is The Great Prophet (Deut.18:15-18) – but He is much more than a prophet. The expression *“God has visited his people!”* (vs.16; *“visited”* [*episkeptomai*]) indicates that they knew God was working through Jesus but does not indicate that they believed Jesus is God (Ex.4:31; Ruth 1:6; Lk.1:68, 78).

In stark contrast, in response to hearing Jesus declaring Himself to be *“the resurrection and the life”* (Jn.11:25), before raising Lazarus from the dead, Martha said: *“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world”* (Jn.11:27). After Jesus rose Lazarus from the dead we read that *“Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him”* (Jn.11:46). Tragically, we also read that the religious leaders, upon hearing that Jesus rose Lazarus from the dead, *“made plans to put [Jesus] to death”* (Jn.11:53) and *“plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus”* (Jn.12:10-11).

5. The Report (vs.17)

- Not surprisingly, *“this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country”* (vs.17). The raising of the widow’s son was the number one trending topic of the day – and mostly likely for days. The news spread like a wildfire – from “Nain” (vs.11) in Galilee, *“through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country”* (vs.17) – throughout all of New Testament Palestine.

Conclusion

- Like the people of Nain, many people acknowledge that Jesus was a real person. They will even admit that He was a good man, a great teacher, a prophet of God, and/or a miracle-worker, but they refuse to confess Him as the Son of God. Furthermore, many will “accept” Him as their Savior and reject Him as their Lord.

✓ Illust: C. S. Lewis wrote these incredibly profound and helpful words:

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about [Christ]: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. *You must make your choice.* Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool; you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great moral teacher. *He has not left that open to us.* He did not intend to” (*Mere Christianity*, 1960, pp. 40–41; italics mine).

- Merely believing that Jesus existed is not enough. Simply affirming that He was godly or that wielded the power of God is not enough. Unless a person truly believes that Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God, and the one and only Savior from God, they cannot (will not) be saved. Unless a person truly receives Jesus as the only Savior, and follows Him as Lord, there is no salvation.

John 3:16-18 ~ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

John 14:6 ~ “Jesus said ... ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” (Acts 4:12; 1Jn.2:23; 5:11-12)

- The people of Nain did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah (the Son) of God. May you not make that same eternally tragic mistake.