

The Widow of Nain

Luke 7:11-17: “Now it happened, the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’ Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen up among us; and God has visited His people.’ And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.”

Let's pray:

Lord, we thank You for giving to each one of us something to experience Your love and mercy. At times we think we know the lessons of the gospels only to discover more lessons to learn from a different angle. Lord, we thank You that You still consider us teachable and have something to tell us this morning. Lord, help us to be humble and to trust You more so we can all learn and grow together in praising Your name. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Jesus Raises a Widow's Only Son

After Jesus had healed the centurion's servant, He left Capernaum the next day heading south. Jesus had more than His twelve disciples with Him. Because of His miracles and teachings many other people followed Him as well. They wanted to see what else Jesus would do. So, there was an air of excitement and expectation with this group. While they were on their way, Jesus indicated His desire to go by the city of Nain. You may ask, “What is there in Nain?” And most of us would answer, “Not much.” Nain was not known for anything. It was commonly a small town, a

village. It was a pitstop for travelers between Galilee and Jerusalem, but Jesus knew better. He had an appointment to make in this small town.

Funeral Procession of a Widow's Only Son

As they were about to enter the city a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And she had already gone through the traumatic experience. And a large crowd from the town was with her for the funeral procession. In other words, there were two large crowds arriving at the gate at the same time.

Let's take another look at verse 12: "A dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow."

This verse is filled with sadness. This woman had already gone through the tremendous experience of losing her husband. Now she had lost her only son. This means that she was destitute; there was no one to provide for her. When they are in that culture, they could not work. They are dependent on their husband. If the husband should die, then they would depend on their son, and if their son should die, they would be forced to beg. That was the condition of this woman. She had no one to turn to, no one to take care of her. So how do we respond to the funeral procession in our society today? Drivers in our days would usually slow down or pull over out of respect. Some would put their hands together, signifying prayers on the part of the grieving.

Since Nain was a small town, most people knew this woman and the unfortunate story of her life. My guess is probably the whole town would show up for the funeral procession. So here we are with two large groups of people gathering at the gate, and it must have been awkward at the beginning for the joyful party now realizes that the excitement is out of place, so they quickly quiet down and soon they have a grieving demeanor. It is uncomfortable for everyone. We do not know how to act or what to say. Most likely, we would end up mumbling something polite about feeling sorry for her loss. Although what has come with good

intention and tactful, none of what we say could ease the pain of the widow.

Jesus Felt Compassion for Her

Then Jesus appeared on the scene. The first thing Jesus said to the woman was, “Do not weep.” There must be an unwritten rule somewhere against telling the grieving party not to cry at the funeral service. That is a no, no, but that is what Jesus did. We can almost hear the murmur of the crowd at Jesus’ statement: “What are you talking about? Do not cry! Do not weep? The woman just lost her only son; how insensitive You are! Instead of telling her not to cry, we all should be crying with her in the same way. If we make a big sign: “Please do not cry,” and place it in the parlor of a funeral home, you would be labeled as heartless, unkind or something worse. Yes, you can cry. Jesus Himself cried outside the tomb of Lazarus. If Jesus can cry, so can we. There is in verse 13, it is clearly stated that Jesus had compassion on her. In fact, Jesus brought something that is more than compassion because He was bringing a real resolution. We know that Jesus is not heartless, nor is He insensitive nor cruel. If anything, Jesus feels, knows and understands the pain of the widow better than anyone else.

In verse 13 Jesus did not forbid the woman’s cry, “Thou should not cry.” He was telling the woman that there was no need to cry because He was there to help her. Jesus knew what the widow was going through. In telling her not to weep, Jesus was asking her to trust Him. Jesus knew what was going on, and everything was under His control. He came to comfort the woman by revealing to her that He is the Lord of resurrection and life. Unfortunately, we do not always understand Jesus’ way of doing things. In appearance Jesus’ approach seemed to run against the tradition, and Jesus’ manner or rather the lack of offended many people. So, what did Jesus do next?

Jesus Touched the Coffin

In verse 14, Jesus proceeded to touch the open coffin. If Jesus's earlier request for the woman to stop crying had not rubbed the crowd the wrong way, touching the open coffin would certainly have turned them off because He defiled Himself. Can't you just hear the gasps in the crowd? Then Jesus said to the dead person, "Young man, I say to you, Arise." By now the crowd thought for sure that Jesus was a lunatic. First, He asked the grieving, destitute woman not to cry; then He defiled Himself by touching the open coffin. Now He was talking to a dead person, but not just talking, He was commanding the dead person to get up. Won't you agree that we have a mad Man here? But wait a minute, something happened that caused their eyes to pop out and jaws to drop open.

Jesus Gave the Young Man Back to His Mother

In verse 15, it says, "Jesus raises the boy from the dead and tells the boy to rise."

So, the boy sat up in the open coffin and began to talk. We do not know what the boy said because the Bible does not tell us. So, Jesus returned the boy to his mother. If she was crying before, she really was crying now, not tears of sorrow, but tears of joy. She got her son back; it was too good to be true.

Encouragements

Always Remember Jesus Is God

Now the question is: Why do we fail to cooperate with Jesus? Why do we feel offended by Jesus' way of doing things? I do not have all the answers, but partly because we do not always remember that Jesus is God. Yes, we know Jesus is a miracle worker, but whenever we encounter trials in life, we somehow manage to forget the deity of our Lord Jesus, just like Jesus' disciples. There were times they were literally standing next to Jesus who had the answer to all their problems, yet the disciples

failed to come to Him. We often tell people that our problems are different from others, meaning our problems are too difficult for the Lord to handle. We too are putting limitation on Jesus' ability.

An example can be found in the gospel of Luke, chapter 5, when Peter and company went fishing. They labored all night and caught nothing. So, they gave up and were washing their nets in the morning hours. Then Jesus came and asked them to cast out their nets in the deep water. Peter was thinking. "Teacher, what do you know about fishing? You may be a Master Carpenter, but when it comes to fishing, you are an outsider; we are the real experts. But since You are our Teacher, we will honor Your wish. Nevertheless, one net should be enough to prove You wrong. There is no need to dirty all the nets." Meanwhile, he was waiting for His moment to utter the statement: "I told You so, Jesus, there is no fish here."

There must have been a reason why Simon's name, not Peter's, is exclusively recorded in this portion of the Scriptures. Surprise! Surprise! That one net caught so many fish that it almost sank the two boats. Peter suddenly realized that he had made a terrible mistake: "This Jesus is not merely a Master Carpenter or Teacher; He is the God who made the sea and the fish. So, he fell and told Jesus: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." At the same time, he held onto Jesus and would not let go.

If we confess that Jesus is God, then we will pay close attention to why He says to show our respect. At the same time, we should put ourselves in the position of a servant. Also, the Bible reminds us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, God's ways are not our ways. They are way above ours, like heaven is above the earth.

Jesus Always Has Us in His Heart

There are times when we may feel like the widow of Nain, name-less, helpless, and hopeless. Does Jesus care for a nobody? The poor widow did not ask for help, but that does not mean that Jesus would have forgotten her. Jesus always has us in His heart. He cares about us.

When I was young, I heard my mother often singing this simple hymn, entitled, “Thou Thinkest, Lord, Of Me” number 441 in our hymn book. Years later, I left home for America. Soon that hymn became my life saver also. I still hum it from time to time to refresh my soul. It gives me much comfort to know the Lord is thinking of us. We are not alone.

For this hymn I prefer to sing the Chinese version, probably because of the difference in the language. The translator was able to squeeze in a few Chinese characters in the same space to make a Chinese expression out of it. Let us take the first line for instance.

The English version goes something like this: “Amid the trials that I meet; amid the thorns that pierce my feet.” And the Chinese version goes like this: “When I meet trials and disasters, through thorns and the territory of wild beasts. But one thought remains supremely sweet. Thou thinkest, Lord, of me. Thou thinkest, Lord of me; Thou, thinkest, Lord of me. What need I fear since Thou near, and thinkest Lord of me?”

No matter what situation we are in, nothing can prevent the Lord from thinking of us. I can imagine the widow of Nain must have been confused when she looked up at Jesus. “Sir, I do not remember sending a note for your service.” “But You are crying?” “Yes, indeed, I cry. I heard your cry.” The woman did not ask for help; she did not seek it. The Lord did it for her out of love and compassion. The Lord will do this for you and for me, too. He often does it without us even asking. We ought to be grateful to the Lord. He is working continually in our lives behind the scenes to provide for us to meet our needs, and if we run into sorrow and despair, He will come along and tell us not to cry and not to weep. He will help you to turn your sorrow into joy.

I still remember my college days when we sang the hymn: “Does Jesus Care.” We sang the chorus lines loudly and with confidence. “Oh, yes, He cares. I know He cares; His heart is touched with my grief.”

Still some people are reluctant to call on the Lord for help because of our past sins and failures. The devil would like to convince us that God’s

well of mercy must have a bottom to it. It is like writing too many mercy checks. Sooner or later when it bounces, we assume that God can only forgive us so many times. But think this way: why remains unprotected and exposed in the territory of wild beasts? Let's confess our sins. Besides there is no other way that our sins can be forgiven to set us free.

The Prodigal Son

Take the story of the prodigal son. We don't usually take into consideration the father's agony of anxiously waiting every day because of our unnecessary delay. What have you got to lose if you go home today? The Father is thinking of us and is eager to have us back. The Bible tells us, God is merciful to all people. He also wants us to learn from His example, from being merciful to our fellowman.

Another reason why we fail to cooperate with the Lord is the fact that we do not know the Lord well. How much do we know the Lord? I guess we should use another approach. Do you know President Biden? Sure, we have all heard about him from the news media, but if President Biden is our neighbor, who we may run into occasionally, then we would get to know him a little bit. However, if President Biden is a close friend, then you would know a lot more. We may even help each other in time of need. How much do we know the Lord? Is it a little second-hand knowledge about Him or is He our neighbor whom we may occasionally run into or is He our close Friend? It is important to know what God likes and dislikes, sometimes it takes a good friend to find out.

Hosea 6:6: "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

In the days of Hosea, people of Israel still offered burnt offerings to God, but their hearts were far away from Him. They were just going through the motions of worship. This verse from Hosea is a reminder that God delights to show mercy to all people, and He measures the heart of the worshipper more than religious rituals. And the knowledge of God here is not the knowledge of who God is. It is experiential knowledge that

comes from walking with the Lord and obeying His Word. In other words, the Lord cares to establish a meaningful relationship with man.

Once I was in Kyrgyzstan which is a small country in central Asia. To give you a rough idea of its location, it is situated west of China, north of Afghanistan. It is more than 1,000 miles to the nearest seashore. Kurdistan is a poor country. Their marketplace is where you can get food and household products. Their food vendors offered only a few items on display. I get the feeling that America has more options, more choices on pet food than Kyrgyzstan on human food. I have visited the market place a few times and never found seafood on display.

One day the host family gave me a surprise dinner party. They explained to me, that they were lucky enough to get hold of a fish from the marketplace that morning, so they prepared a fish dish that day. All I can tell you that it was beautifully displayed. The problem was they did not ask me beforehand. You see, I have many idiosyncrasies, and one of them is that I do not like eating fish especially cooked the Chinese way. It was supposed to be a surprise party, a special treat. Unfortunately, it was a disappointment to both parties. Even though they had gone through a lot of trouble to prepare this dish for me, now my host family had found out about my ideocracies. They no longer served me fish.

Do We Know What Jesus Likes?

But in our daily life, we do not treat Jesus the same way. We do not even bother to find out what He likes and dislikes. Like the people of Hosea's time, they just kept going through the same religious routine and neglected to establish a close relationship with the Lord. Again, God delights to show mercy to all people. This is the basis of our prayers. Jesus quoted this verse from Hosea twice in the gospel of Matthew. There is one other verse in the Bible that carries the same message.

In I Samuel 15 where Samuel told King Saul, "To obey is better than sacrifice." Being God's good friend comes with many benefits. The more we walk with the Lord, the more He will reveal Himself to us. God will

show more love to us and will show more grace on us and will answer more prayers, and in the process, we are learning the joy of the Lord is our strength.

Father's Desire to Restore the Prodigal Unto Sonship

We mentioned earlier that God's thoughts are not our thoughts. God's ways are not our ways. How different are they! Maybe we can get some idea from the story of the prodigal son. Let's start with the son for comparison after the prodigal son came to his senses. He was thinking, "In my father's house all the servants have at least three meals a day and bread to spare; Why am I still here starving to death?" So he started contemplating the thought of going home, but then he hesitated: "Wait a minute. What if my father is still mad at me for what I have done. And I do not really deserve to be my father's son. But my father is rich; he normally hires many helpers around the house. Maybe he will consider hiring me as a servant. That sounds like the best deal I can hope for, that is to be a hired servant at the father's house."

So, what about the father? Now the son was on his way home. When the father spotted him over the horizon, he had compassion for his son who now looked like a beggar. He went up to him, hugged him, and kissed him. At this point, the son was ready to recite his repentance speech, but the father cut him off. Instead, the father kissed the son repeatedly. That was his father's way of saying, "Son, I have heard enough; all your sins are forgiven." Then the father turned to the servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet, and prepare a banquet; let's celebrate." To put the best robe on your prodigal son! Do you not know your son is completely broke? He might just sell it to the nearest pawn shop. And the ring is equivalent to the father's credit card in our society today. Are you not worried that he may overcharge? "Let him spend it; that is the reason I gave the credit card to him in the first place so that he can spend it."

Why was the father so excited about his returned son? The same reason the widow really began to cry. Now her son was given a second chance to live. He brought her son back, and it is too good to be true. In this case, the father thought his son was dead and lost. Now his son was given a second chance to live. He got his son back; it was too good to be true.

The story of the prodigal son is not about the property of the wayward son. It is to show the riches of the father and his generosity. Indeed, our heavenly Father's grace account has unlimited funds. Our heavenly Father is rich in love and mercy.

Robe, ring, shoes are for individual use. A banquet is not; a banquet is for group activity. In other words, the Father called for a banquet because He wanted to restore the prodigal son's sonship publicly. Not only was he the former beggar, but now he looked decent. He was also given the power and authority to be his father's son, and the father was happy. Obviously the father's thoughts and ways are far better than the son's.

Summary

In summary, the Lord used a widow of no name from a small town in the middle of nowhere to illustrate a point. God considers no person or place to be unimportant. God knows what we are going through in our lives. He considers no suffering and sorrow insignificant. The Lord cares for us, and He always remembers us even though we do not always understand His way of doing things. The Lord can be trusted. The Lord is working continually in our lives behind the scenes to supply for us and meet our needs. Just in case we forget, the story of the prodigal son is a reminder that God's thoughts and ways are far better than ours.

Let's pray:

Lord, we thank You for these words of encouragement. It gives us much comfort to know You are always thinking of us. Lord, help us to

*count Your works in our lives and give glory to Your name. In Jesus' name.
Amen.*