



The Gospel According to Luke

December 16, 2018

Reading: 1 Kings 17:17-24

Sermon #27

Luke 7:11-17



Tragedy In Life

I admit I have random thoughts on a regular basis. I have often wished I had grown up in a strong Christian home. Certainly, there were prices to pay for not being raised Christian. However, this week I thought of one benefit for me not growing up in a Christian home or in a specific denomination and not coming to Christ until my 30s. I thought about being part of a church, like Canyon Bible and the benefit is this - I read the scriptures to learn what God has to teach me and not to reinforce what I was taught all my life. Anytime controversy arises I can go to God's Word to see what he teaches and am not concerned with the traditions of man. This was one of the problems with the Jewish nation at the time of Christ – tradition, rules and laws had replaced a relationship with God. History seems to be always repeating itself. It is my ambition that we, as a community, are growing in our ability to understand God's Word and let his words teach us and mold us into his definition of what a Christian is, not what society or churches or men have defined as Christian. Now, we will move into more organized thoughts.

Our passage this morning is Luke 7, verses 11 to 17 that deals with a tragedy of life. In verses 11 and 12 we read about the tragedy. In verses 13 to 15 we discover comfort in the midst of tragedy and in verses 16 and 17 the consequences.



Tragedy

As a pastor I have had the privilege, and the burden and the heart break of being with families when tragedy has struck. To be there to listen, to care for others, to hug, to pray, to just be there and say nothing and it is all a privilege. Life has many twists and turns and without God it can be a nightmare. In the Old



Testament book of Ecclesiastes, one discovers the reflections of an old man called the “Preacher” as he considered the question, “What is the meaning of life?” Let me read his thoughts, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: ² a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; ³ a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ⁵ a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; ⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; ⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8) There are seasons and balance and joy and suffering. It was also made into a great folk song by Pete Seeger in 1959.



Life can be a rollercoaster and we can feel out of control. Where do we find balance to not let the highs inflate our egos and the lows crush us? There is a remnant, a small number of people who know this balance, this comfort by the strength of another – Jesus Christ. Even many who label themselves as Christian try to deal with the highs and the tragedies on their own and soon find themselves out of control. Everything out of control – then they fight harder for complete control but none of it works.

Tragedies are bad enough by themselves. If we do not make use of God’s source of comfort, these tragedies will be worse than they need to be. We are introduced to this source of comfort in Luke 7:11-17. Some of you, if you have already been through a terrible tragedy may have experienced this source of comfort. The rest need to know about this source of comfort – for let me assure you, just by living in this broken world - tragedy is coming. The account begins in Luke 7:11-12 with Jesus meeting a woman who has experienced a terrible tragedy.

Reading at verse 11, “Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. ¹² As 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.” Before we proceed let me set the background and setting of this event.



Previously, Jesus was in the town of Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where he healed a centurion’s servant. Soon afterward he and his disciples travel about 25 to 30 miles south to the city of Nain located on the northwest slope of Mount Moreh, which lays 6 miles southwest of Mt. Tabor the site of Jesus’ transfiguration and 9 miles south of Nazareth. He goes there with a large crowd and his 12 disciples who would become apostles. Because of his miracles and teachings, many other learners and seekers and the curious are following Him as well. There is an air of excitement and expectation around this crowd. They have heard some amazing truths from Jesus. They have seen Him perform an incredible healing. They want to see what He will do next.



As He and this expectant crowd enter Nain, they meet another large crowd coming out. This second crowd, however, is not joyful. There is not an air of expectation about them. Just the opposite. They are weeping and mourning. They are not following a man who feeds them, gives them truth of life and great teachings. Instead, this second group is following a dead man.

Luke records that the crowd of mourners was following a dead man, the only son of his mother and she was a widow. This sentence is filled with sorrow. This woman is a widow. She has already lost her husband. She has already experienced that grief and now she has lost her only son as well. This means she will mostly likely be destitute. She has no way to provide for herself. In that culture, commonly women could not work. They depended on their husbands. If

their husband died, they depended on a son. If their son died, they would be forced to beg. That was this woman's situation, now. She most likely had no one to provide for her. No one to take care of her. We can hope she had extended family of married brothers or sisters who would have pity on her. But those were problems for tomorrow.

Her immediate concern was that she had once again lost someone she loved dearly. In the midst of the crowd she was alone. Although most of these people were her friends and neighbors, some were probably professional mourners who had been hired to mourn. They were paid to cry. In Jewish culture of that time, when someone died, you paid people to come and mourn with you. She has got a crowd of people around her, but she really is alone, for how genuine is mourning if you have to pay people to do it? This is the way it is when a loved one dies. If one has not experienced this kind of loss, they cannot understand. Not only are you experiencing intense grief, but without your spouse or your children you feel alone.

Worse yet, when a loved one dies, the world does not stop. It seems like it should, out of respect for you and your grief. But it doesn't. The traffic still buzzes by. The bills still arrive in the mail. The birds still chirp. The sun still rises in the morning. When a loved one dies, you want the rest of the world to pause - to stand still with you. To cry with you. But most people do not want to be around death, people are uncomfortable with death. Yet no matter how many people were there, the grieving widow only wants one thing - her son back.

Now the crowd of mourners meets the crowd of those excited to see what Jesus will do in the town of Nain. People are expectant and talking and laughing. The excitement is focused on one man. As the widow sees this excited throng of people approaching and milling around Jesus, she might be thinking this is the last thing and person I want at my son's funeral. But Jesus is exactly who I want at my

funeral and this widow will come to see he is the most precious guest at every funeral, especially for those who believe.

The two crowds meet outside the gates of Nain. It is awkward at first. The joyful party, recognizing that their excitement is out of place, quickly quiets down, and adopts a grieving demeanor. But it is hard to change so quickly. Some of them are only able to express a detached sorrow for her grief. Their expressions show that they feel sorry for her, but they are not really sorrowful. Some are thinking, “Too bad for her. At least nothing like this has happened to me. I will just put on my sorry face until she passes. Then we can get on with life.” Unfortunately, this is how some feel when someone else suffers. “I will do my duty and frown for her, but I hope she moves by quickly. I have got to get on with my life.” Death, tragedy and suffer is uncomfortable for most people. They don’t know how to act or what to say. A few mumble something polite about being sorry for her loss. They do not truly understand her pain.

Except for one man, the man who has everyone’s attention. There is kindness on this man’s face. There is genuine, intense grief and compassion in His eyes. He understands her lost and pain. As His eyes meet hers and He alone sees Her real pain, he decides to comfort her and teach the principal Elijah taught over 500 years ago. God sent Elijah to live with a widow and her son. They had not enough food for themselves, but they took Elijah in and fed and cared for him. The son dies and the woman questions God and his prophet. By the power of God though his prophet the boy is brought back to life and **“The woman said to Elijah, ‘Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.’”** (1 Kings 17:24) She believed because God took mercy upon her and demonstrated his unlimited power. Now hundreds of years later Jesus will have mercy upon another man and his widowed mother’s lost and he will demonstrate the power of God and his authority given by God the Father.





Comfort

Continuing in Luke account at verse 13, “**And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her 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. How can Jesus have compassion and tell this grieving widow “**Do not weep.**”?

Can you hear the shocked outrage of the professional mourners? “Do not weep? Do not weep? What are you talking about? She just lost her only son, you are an insensitive man. Don’t tell her not to cry. Of course, she should cry. Instead of telling her not to weep, you should be weeping with her!” Is that not how you would respond if you lost a child and someone told you to stop crying? I believe that is how most anybody would respond. If you go to almost any funeral and tell the family members to stop crying, you will be considered heartless and unkind, even if you say it in the most compassionate way.

We have the benefit of history and knowing the whole story, we know that Jesus is not heartless. He is anything but cruel. He is not insensitive. The text says that He had compassion on her and that is why He told her not to cry. I

 looked up the definition of “compassion.” Merriam-Webster says, “**compassion is the sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.**” Jesus is the model of compassion for this widow and for you and me. He feels and knows and understands the pain in people’s hearts and souls. He is communicating to this widow I know your pain and I have compassion – trust me.

 Jesus acts upon his compassion in verse 14, Jesus “**came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still.**” What is a “Bier” you might be asking. A Bier is the framework for carrying the coffin and the coffin itself. A stranger moves up to

the coffin and touches it – the mourners stop in shock and everything becomes still and quiet. The mourners observe this man must be some kind of teacher or rabbi and in the Jewish cultural a teacher or rabbi would never touch a dead body or



even the coffin the body was in for this would make them “unclean.” “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them, No one shall make himself unclean for the dead among his people.’” (Leviticus 21:1)

First, Jesus shocks people by telling the widow not to cry and now they would be stunned by his touching the coffin. Jesus touches death and becomes unclean – just as he would do on the cross for the sins of mankind.



Notice that the mother has not yet said a word. She has not asked for anything. She has not asked for a miracle. She has not thrown herself at the Savior’s feet and begged for the life of her son. Unlike the centurion, she has not demonstrated great faith or any faith for that matter. As far as we know, she does not even know who Jesus is. Which makes Christ’s next words so astounding. Jesus said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.”

First, Jesus tells a grieving, bereaved, destitute widow, “Don’t cry.” Then He defiles Himself by touching the coffin. Now he talking to the dead man and not just talking to the dead man, but commanding him to rise up! The crowd that came with Jesus is holding their breath waiting to see what happens. The crowd of mourners are in shock and on the verge of outburst. What happened next took everyone by surprise. Verse 15 reads, “the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.” We do not know what the young man said and it is not important. The mother has been weeping in pain and sorrow, but now she has tears of joy, laughter and wonder. Her son is alive! I would say Jesus has fulfilled the definition of “compassion”. Once the shock of her son rising from the dead has passed the widow maybe thinking who is this man that brings the dead back to life? Jesus has given comfort and compassion were none was hoped for –

it was not asked for, it was not sought, but it came.

If you are going through a time of trial and testing, if you are facing a tragedy, Jesus knows, Jesus sees, even when everybody else does not. Jesus says to you today or when that tragedy comes, “Do not weep. I will turn your mourning into laughter – even if you have to wait for heaven.” The problem is we want comfort now. One might say, I believe in being in heaven, in the presence of my Lord, but what about now, what about getting through this life? Since Jesus has returned to the Father where am I to find comfort?

Jesus tells his disciples in the tragedy foretold in John chapter 13 in the Upper Room discourse and with comfort beginning in chapter 14. Jesus begins by explaining to his disciples that it is time for him to die and that they will deny him. This is the worst of news – first, Jesus, who by this time the disciples believe is the Messiah is going to die and they do not yet understand why he must die. Then secondly, Jesus says they will deny him and they are wounded because as Peter sincerely says, “**Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.**”³⁸ **Jesus answered, ‘Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.’**” (John 13:37-38) Jesus is saying to them it must be so for God’s plan of salvation, but at this point they are like the widow in pain and numb with this horrible news. Their dreams are crumbling before their eyes and soon like the widow they will feel isolated and all alone. But Jesus does not stop at chapter 13. Jesus wants them to be comforted.

John chapter 14 begins with Jesus saying, “**Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.**” Jesus wants them to be comforted just as the widow, even though at this point, they do not see a path to find comfort. Jesus spends the rest of chapter 14 giving his disciples reasons to be comforted.

In the rest of John chapter 14, Jesus gives them several reasons why they should not cry; why their hearts should not be troubled. I don't have time to explain them all. I want to address one. Reading at verse 15, Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." The foundational way Christians express their love for their Lord and Savior is by living obedient to Jesus' teaching and commands. When one is obedient and lives Jesus' commandments, even if one does not fully understand, they receive a promise. Jesus continues in verse 16, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." Who is the Helper or Comforter? Who is it that will comfort us during the tragedies of life? It is the person of God, the Holy Spirit that lives within every believer.

A life lived through Christ and his Spirit turns sorrow to joy. Jesus said later in John chapter 16, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy." (v.20) The widow in Luke chapter 7 wept on her way to the graveyard and she came upon a crowd of rejoicing people. Leading this crowd was Jesus who turned her sorrow into joy. She did not ask for it and you do not deserve it, but Christ lovingly gives it. She did not seek a miracle of Jesus and neither did you. You were spiritually dead and were unable to seek him but he breathed life into your soul. Jesus is the definition of love and compassion.

Jesus is with us and carries us through the tragedies. When tragedy strikes go ahead and cry for there is a time to mourn. As the Preacher in Ecclesiastes wrote there is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." (v. 4) But Jesus brings us through our sorrow and places peace and joy in our hearts. We are comforted by God's Word, His Holy Spirit and the promises he

has fulfilled and will fulfill.




J. Hudson Taylor spent much of his life in study of God's Word and in prayer. God called him to China as a missionary. While there he lost a wife and two children. After his wife died, he wrote the following words attempting to express both pain and joy, *"I cannot describe to you my feelings. I do not understand them myself. I feel like a person stunned with a blow, or recovering from a faint, and as yet but partially conscious. My Father has ordered it, so therefore I know it is—it must be—best, and I thank him for so ordering it. I feel utterly crushed. Oftentimes my heart is nigh to breaking, but withal I had almost said I never knew what peace and happiness were before—so much have I enjoyed in the very sorrow."* Jesus through his Spirit brings a strange mixture of weeping and sorrow with joy and peace.

Others share similar experiences. There is always great, intense pain, but for believers, in the midst of pain, there is also a sense of joy and peace never before experienced. I cannot say how it has been for you or how I would respond in your situation. This is because Jesus comes to each believer, through the comforting work of the Holy Spirit, to give joy where there should be only sorrow, and peace where there should be only pain. Jesus too is the man of sorrows, acquainted with suffering and familiar with grief. He provides solace to those who cry. Some people receive comfort right away. For others, the comfort comes slower. But when you allow the Holy Spirit to do His job, when you allow Him to comfort those who mourn, he turns sorrow into joy. As the prophet Isaiah said in chapter 61, verse 3 God turns ashes into beauty and mourning into gladness. When one allows Jesus and God's Spirit to work in their hearts and souls there are amazing consequences that follow.

Consequences

We finish with Jesus' purpose for performing the miracle of raising a dead young man and restoring him to his mother. Reading at verse 16, 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." The miracle confirmed Jesus worked under the power and authority of God the Father. It showed He was the Messiah. Many came to believe in Him as their Lord and Savior unto salvation. Many did not, even though the evidence was clear they had no Spirit in their soul. As it says in verse 16, "God has visited his people!" God the Father sent God the Son and the report of him has spread around the world. The question before mankind is do you believe in Jesus as the Christ and will you let him eternally change your weeping and sorrow into joy and peace?

 Jesus made the path to salvation clear, reading from John chapter 14, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." He continues in verse 15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." My beloved, to believe unto salvation - means to believe in Christ as your Savior and live what you believe. Amen.