

## Luke 7B

- Christ's ministry on earth was first and foremost about suffering and dying for the sins of the World
  - But as Jesus went through the course of His earthly life, He was also using the time He had with His disciples to prepare them for His departure – and for their own ministries in telling the world about Jesus
  - That preparation had two parts – much like how we train people today
    - First came the didactic part – lecture or classroom training
    - But Jesus also took many opportunities to provide a second kind of training which reinforced the first
    - He often demonstrated the truth of His teaching by how He lived out His ministry
  - In Chapter 6 of Luke, we saw the didactic training begin, and it will continue all the way to the cross
  - And last week in Chapter 7, Jesus begins to provide the first of many demonstrations of these truths in His ministry
- Last week, we saw Jesus demonstrate that all men deserved God's mercy, even Gentiles – and all would enter on the basis of faith in the Messiah
  - Jesus having praise the Roman soldier for displaying a faith greater than anyone in Israel in that day
- Today we continue in Chapter 7 as Jesus moves to a new practical demonstration – the reality that the Law has not a means to righteousness
  - In fact, The Law stands in the way of God's mercy for those who misunderstand its purpose
  - And Jesus' demonstration takes place through the raising of a young boy from the dead

[Luke 7:11](#) ¶ Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd.

[Luke 7:12](#) Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her.

[Luke 7:13](#) When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.”

- Jesus leaves Capernaum again and this time he goes Southwest about 20 miles to a town in the Jezreel Valley called Nain
  - The town was located on a hill called the Hill of Moreh or Har-Moreh
    - Travel along a connecting road about 10 miles you reach another hill, called Meggido
    - Armeggedon
  - Har-Moreh has some significance in the OT, as it was the site where Elisha brought the son of a Shunammite woman back to life (2King 4)
  - Jesus must have understood the connection as he used this site for His first recorded raising of the dead
- You should also notice in Luke’s description that Jesus is now continually followed by large crowds
  - Luke mentions that there are disciples and a large crowd in verse 11
  - Jesus was a spectacle now and His reputation eliminated any chance that he might travel incognito
    - As we’ve been doing already, then, it’s important to take time to understand whether Jesus teaching is directed specifically at the disciples, the crowd or both
    - Sometimes the message can be different for the two different audiences
- The scene plays out in a straightforward manner
  - You have Jesus approaching the gate of the town of Nain
    - This gate would have been the only way into and out of the town, as it was surrounded by a wall for protection

- The other thing to know about ancient culture was they buried their dead outside the city walls
    - There was no space within the tight confines of the city for a cemetery
  - So essentially, Jesus is almost forced into contact with the funeral procession as they leave the town carrying the body prepared for burial
    - Their encounter in this moment creates an opportunity for Jesus to teach the disciples and the crowd another object lesson in true righteousness
- Jesus encounters the woman and this large funeral party proceeding out the gate
  - Because the procession is leaving the city, we know the body has been prepared for burial
    - It is wrapped in cloths, covered in drying powders like Myrrh
    - Which means the body has been dead for a day or two by now
    - To everyone involved in this funeral, there's no doubt this body is dead
- Luke tells us that the body is that of a man, the only son of a widow
  - This is a significant detail, because it ties the events of this moment to the events of 2Kings 4 & 1Kings 17
    - Which then sets up a series of events later in this chapter
  - Meanwhile, it adds emphasis to the suffering of this woman
    - A widow in that culture was a very vulnerable person
    - And if she was without a son to care for her, she was likely to live out her days begging or struggling to find a way to feed herself
  - And this detail helps explain Jesus compassion for this woman
  - But it was just as significant that Jesus even stopped to notice this woman and take pity
- Think about what it says about that society to know that a widow was the most vulnerable member of society

- Consider for a moment that the society had so little regard for it's most vulnerable members that as a widow, unless you had a son to care for you, you might starve to death
- The entire story of Ruth exists in part because of this weakness in that culture
  - Compassion in the Jewish culture was a rare commodity
    - They were not accustomed to showing mercy and compassion,
    - They were the “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” culture
  - Their misuse and interpretation law had left them with a harsh, unforgiving , uncompassionate, judgmental view of life
    - Just as any legalistic approach to righteousness will do
- And so widows who were left without sons were simply being “judged by God” or were paying the price for their parents sin, etc.
  - Even the fact that there were many mourners in the procession and yet she was destitute and facing dire economic circumstances says a lot about how hard hearted these very religious people had become
- Then Jesus comes along,
  - He not only takes notice of this woman, but Luke tells us He had compassion on her – more importantly, compassion that rose to the level of taking action to help her
  - I’m sure many of the mourners in the procession had compassion of sorts for this woman, but it’s doubtful any were willing to take her in and help her
- James wrote his letter because of this very problem carrying over from the Jewish culture into the early Christian church
  - Despite their profession of faith in Christ, they continued to be hard hearted toward one another
  - James was so concerned about this pattern, that he felt it put into question whether they were truly saved

[James 2:14](#) ¶ What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

[James 2:15](#) If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,  
[James 2:16](#) and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?

[James 2:17](#) Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.

- Just as when Jesus walked the earth, He still desires to show compassion to the least fortunate today, but He desires to do it through His Church
- And when His church merely shows compassion through words, it is no compassion at all
  - And James says that if a professing Christian lives their life that way – without visible compassion for the needs of others –
    - We have reason to question the legitimacy – or at least the usefulness - of their faith
  - What made Jesus compassion known was His willingness to act upon it – unlike the others around the widow who wouldn’t do more than simply what was required by tradition
- Let’s take note ourselves of Jesus as a compassionate Lord
  - It’s easy to speak in compassionate words, to tell people that we’ll pray for them, to go through the motions of obligatory protocol much like those mourners
  - But Jesus demonstrates what true compassion looks like – and we are told to be like Him
    - So, let’s take note of those God places in our path, those who may be the overlooked and vulnerable in our culture
      - Without judgment, without excuse
    - Help doesn’t always mean money – in fact, it usually doesn’t mean money
      - Don’t look for the easy way out – like money to the street begger
      - Ex. Jesus giving money to the widow

- Compassion means a true concern for their needs, help means giving of your time and talents, help means taking a real interest in them and their needs
  - But always with the purpose of teaching men about the Lord so they might know him
  - Sacks to the homeless example
- As we are faithful to imitating Christ in this way, God can be seen showing His compassion through Christ again – this time through Christ in us
- When Jesus encounters this funeral procession, He actually stops it so He can help

[Luke 7:14](#) And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise!”

[Luke 7:15](#) The dead man sat up and began to speak. And *Jesus* gave him back to his mother.

[Luke 7:16](#) Fear gripped them all, and they *began* glorifying God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and, “God has visited His people!”

[Luke 7:17](#) This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.

- Jesus notices the procession, learns the woman’s situation, and then He does something calculated to shock the disciples and the crowd
  - He touches the body
    - In verse 14, Luke records that Jesus touched the coffin, but the word in Greek (*soros*) literally means bier, or the stretcher they carried the wrapped body on
    - So Jesus was literally touching the body itself
- Why is this so shocking?
  - By touching the body, Jesus had rendered himself ritually unclean
    - The law made this requirement in Numbers 19:

[Num. 19:11](#) ¶ ‘The one who touches the corpse of any person shall be unclean for seven days.

[Num. 19:12](#) ‘That one shall purify himself from uncleanness with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, *and then* he will be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean.

[Num. 19:13](#) ‘Anyone who touches a corpse, the body of a man who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from Israel. Because the water for impurity was not sprinkled on him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is still on him.

- By touching the man, Jesus was in effect making a very powerful statement to His disciples even as He went about demonstrating His power over death to the crowd
  - How can we be so sure that Jesus had this idea on His mind in the midst of this moment?
  - Well, we need to consider what Matt records in his gospel as part of the beatitudes
- Remember, I said that Luke recorded significantly less of the beatitudes than did Matt, and in particular, Luke left out passages that dealt more directly with the Jewish culture
  - Matt on the other hand focused his attention on teachings that were especially important to his Jewish audience
    - Consequently, Matt’s gospel includes a significant passage about the law,
  - And this teaching is helpful background to understanding Jesus’ action here in Nain

[Matt. 5:17](#) ¶ “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

[Matt. 5:18](#) “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

[Matt. 5:19](#) “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

[Matt. 5:20](#) ¶ “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

- This passage was a part of what Jesus had just taught the disciples shortly before making his trip to Capernaum and now Nain
  - In Matt’s account, Jesus uses a kind of reverse psychology to make a point about the law to the disciples

- He says, don't think I came to say that the law is wrong or that God is prepared to ignore it
- In verse 18 He says that the law will not pass away until all that is in it has been accomplished
  - This has two meanings
    - First, God must be satisfied according to His law
    - He cannot by His very nature accept imperfection without passing judgment upon imperfection
    - And He has given the law to represent a holy standard
      - The law wasn't meant to be the complete list of all that holiness requires, but yet it was a standard of holiness
      - We know from Jesus teaching that true holiness meets the conditions of the law and then goes further to include even our thoughts and desires
    - So the first meaning of Jesus statement is that until God is satisfied that all flesh is judged according to the law – either by receiving glory for having kept it perfectly or receiving wrath for having violated it – until then, the law will remain in effect
  - The second meaning is a bit more complex
    - The law was given as part of a covenant from God through Moses to the Israelite nation
    - That covenant provided for certain obligations on the part of the Lord and Israel
  - Only a portion of those obligations have been fulfilled, so it awaits a future time for this covenant to be completely fulfilled
    - It will not be fulfilled until the time of Tribulation and the conclusion of the end times
- But as I said, Jesus is making this reference in an ironic sense, because he is essentially saying that unless the disciples are able to live perfectly, they can't depend upon the law for righteousness

- He says that if someone annuls - (luo) which means breaks – even one of these commandments, you will be least in the kingdom
- To further clarify, Jesus adds in the next verse that unless you can present yourself even more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees, you cannot enter heaven
  - Now keep in mind, Jesus knew that the S & P were not truly righteous people,
  - But since they were seen by the society as representing the height of righteousness, Jesus used that fact to help Him make His point
    - You have to be better than you think them to be
- Jesus wanted His disciples to understand the extremely tough standard required under the law for righteousness
  - It's not simply enough to be very good at keeping the law
  - Anyone wishing to enter heaven by the standard of the Law can't be nearly flawless at keeping the law
  - They would have to be perfect in keeping the law
- The Jews – like people today – had deluded themselves into thinking that God graded on the curve
  - Surely God would recognize their good efforts to be good – to keep the law
  - Oh sure, they had blown it here and there, but come on. God would be reasonable, surely
    - Scale in the sky idea today
- No, according to God, a man working his way to heaven would have to exceed even the Pharisees' efforts at keeping the law
  - And these men were commonly believed to be the gold standard in Jewish society when it came to keeping the law
    - They lived their entire public lives devoted to that task, but it wasn't good enough Jesus said
    - Well, that left them wondering where to go next

- So, having just concluded a teaching in chapter 6 on the impossibility of using the law as a means of obtaining righteousness, here's Jesus...
  - A few days later, intentionally becoming ritually unclean in order to minister compassionately to a widow in need
    - And in doing so, Jesus shows through a demonstration what true righteousness looks like
    - It's love and compassion for another at the expense of self
  - You see, a Pharisee would never have done what Jesus did in raising that man
    - Even assuming it were possible for a Pharisee to raise a dead body to life, if exercising that power had required that a Pharisee physically touch the dead body, none would have dared do it
    - Because keeping the law was more important to a Pharisee than showing compassion, than ministering to others
    - This was the essential concern Christ had when he responded to the Pharisees' criticism at him dining with tax collectors at Matthew's house

[Matt. 9:13](#) "But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,'

- Jesus understood that the Law was not given to make men righteous
  - Not only were the religious leaders misusing it for exactly that purpose,
  - It also had the effect of becoming an excuse against doing the very thing that righteousness often required – showing mercy and compassion
- And that's where the heart of the lesson was for the disciples and for us
  - Jesus was tearing down – brick by brick – the wall of separation that existed between the unholy works of selfish men and the true righteousness of God
    - The disciples needed to understand that the law couldn't make them righteous,

- But more than that, Jesus wanted to demonstrate how any attempt to use the Law in that way actually yields the opposite result
  - It becomes a way of pitting men against men
- Because when it's used to measure men against one another, it robs everyone of compassion and mercy and love and replaces it with judgment, piousness and pride
- When men concentrate all their attention on trying to make themselves righteous by works – it results in a self-centered life absent any compassion or mercy – it is a self-centered pursuit
  - In an economy of works, the participants will always have a selfish outlook on the world
    - Everything they do is connected to making themselves look and feel righteous
    - There is no room for compassion and mercy
    - There is not concern for the world – only for self
  - Meanwhile, those who don't measure up to the rules are seen as deserving whatever bad comes their way
    - And we certainly don't owe them any compassion
  - Consider people you have known – whether Christian or not – who you would consider very rule-oriented, very legalistic in the practice of their faith – perhaps even people who are works-based in their religious beliefs
  - Now consider whether they are also relatively low in compassion and mercy for those they see as unrighteous
    - Are they quick to judge and condemn others
    - Are they often very self-absorbed in their own pursuits, especially pursuits that they believe are closely connected to their own righteousness, of what's right according to their system of beliefs
  - This is the nature effect of allowing our standard of righteousness be based on our actions, on a living out of the law – any law – regardless of how well-meaning it might be

- Such a viewpoint is simply the opposite of grace in all respects
  - Consider that grace begins with compassion, because it is unearned favor
  - By definition, grace is an expression of mercy, because it seeks to give something that is undeserved
  - Grace precludes all judgment and condemnation, even though they are deserved
  - Grace can never be self-focused, because it is inherently motivated by a consideration for the needs of others
    - And it requires placing the needs of the other above any desire to demand retribution
- Jesus just taught in chapter 6 that our obligation to show others grace in this way comes from the fact that God was the one who first showed us grace, a grace we can never equal in all that we might forgive of others
- So Jesus touched the body to show His compassion and to demonstrate the importance of love over law
  - But don't assume that Jesus had violated the law by His actions
    - The Law didn't prohibit touching a body
    - It just demanded purification over three days afterward
  - So we would have expected Jesus to follow that requirement...except
    - Jesus may not have had to purify Himself in this case, because at the point when He touched the body and spoke the words, the man returned to life
    - So who could say that Jesus had come into contact with a dead body – where's the proof?
- And as the body rose up, the text says fear gripped the crowd...no doubt
  - Can you imagine? This would be fear in the truest form
  - Fear over the mystery of Jesus and His power and who He might be
  - Look at their statements

- Some said a great prophet has risen among us
  - There's little doubt that this statement is connected to Elisha's famous miracle on this Hill centuries earlier
  - What Jesus had just done echoed Elijah and Elisha's miracles in several ways
    - Not only was did it occur in roughly the same location as Elisha's miracle, but it involved a woman receiving back her only son as in Elijah's miracle
  - So some of the people naturally began to believe this was the promised return of Elijah from Malachi
- Others said it was God visiting his people
  - This statement is interesting because it sounds so similar to prophetic description of the Messiah – Immanuel from Isaiah 7:14 which means God with us
  - This seems to be the earliest possible indication that people had begun to suggest that Jesus might be the Messiah
  - And this report goes out to the surrounding countryside
    - And that's why we hear what Luke records next...

[Luke 7:18](#) ¶ The disciples of John reported to him about all these things.

[Luke 7:19](#) Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?"

[Luke 7:20](#) When the men came to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, to ask, 'Are You the Expected One, or do we look for someone else?'"

[Luke 7:21](#) At that very time He cured many *people* of diseases and afflictions and evil spirits; and He gave sight to many *who were* blind.

[Luke 7:22](#) And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: *the* BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT, *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed, and *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised up, *the* POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.

[Luke 7:23](#) "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."

- John and his disciples heard the reports of Jesus, reports that must have included the suggestion from verse 16 that Jesus was the Messiah

- Then John does something that seems a bit odd
- He sends two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Expected One (erchomai) which literally means Coming One
  - Well, there was only one who was called the Coming One in Jewish culture
  - John the Baptist was talking about the One promised by the prophets to come to rescue His people
  - The Messiah, in other words
- What's curious about this is why John the Baptist would need to ask this question
  - Why would he be asking Jesus about His identity now?
  - Didn't he recognize who Jesus was when he baptized Him?
  - And the obvious answer, is no
- John the Baptist must have understood that Jesus was a special person, sent by God and holy
  - He may even have suspected that Jesus was the Messiah, but now he asks outright
  - And it's important to note that John's motives in asking are genuine
    - He says, are you the one, or should we continue waiting for someone else?
    - His desire is to know so that he may follow the correct person, be it Jesus or someone else
- And then notice Jesus' answer
  - He says plainly, tell John the Baptist that you've seen the proof
    - The Blind can see and the lame walk, the lepers are cured and the gospel (good news) is proclaimed
    - Jesus is reminded them of Isaiah's prophecies concerning the Expected One, the Messiah

- It begins in Isaiah 35

[Is. 35:4](#) Say to those with anxious heart,  
 “Take courage, fear not.  
 Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance;  
 The recompense of God will come,  
 But He will save you.”

[Is. 35:5](#) Then the eyes of the blind will be opened  
 And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.

[Is. 35:6](#) Then the lame will leap like a deer,  
 And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.  
 For waters will break forth in the wilderness  
 And streams in the Arabah.

- Then it goes on to Isaiah 61

[Is. 61:1](#) ¶ The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,  
 Because the LORD has anointed me  
 To bring good news to the afflicted;  
 He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
 To proclaim liberty to captives  
 And freedom to prisoners;

- Jesus is giving John the answer he desires – and establishes that he is not just a prophet, He is not Elisha, He is the Anointed One, the Messiah.
  - And as we will see in coming chapters, Jesus is not so willing to answer so plainly to others who come asking the same question but with false motives
  - God desires to reveal Himself to the world but He is not going to do in their terms
  - He requires a humble heart first, a heart made ready for the good news, just as John the Baptist called people to make their hearts ready in his day
  - This is a wonderful point for us as well as we enter Christmas
  - Blessed is the he who does not take offense at Christ

- Let's leave here ready to enter a world that celebrates Christmas but takes offense at Christ
- Let's bring them the good news, and more than that, demonstrate it through a love that shows compassion and mercy and grace
- And as Peter says, always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear