

The Basket Case

Luke 7:11-17

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Summary: So far, we have seen Jesus exercise miraculous power over nature, sickness, disease, and demons. But what about death itself? In this stunning display of His divine authority, Jesus demonstrates His power over death and, in the process, gives us—those who believe in Him—a preview of our eternal life to come.

A Christian leader of the past century and his wife experienced the loss of three sons; one son at 18 days following emergency surgery; another son died at 5-years-old from leukemia; their third son died at 18 years of age following an accident.

This Christian leader would write, “The death of a child—of all deaths—seems most unnatural and hardest to bear. It's like putting a period before the end of a sentence, when the sentence has hardly begun. We expect the elderly to die but [not the young] when life lies ahead [of them] with beauty and wonder and potential. Death seems like a cruel thief when it strikes down the young. When the child dies, part of the parents is buried with them. I met a man who was in his 70s. During our first few minutes together, he brought out an old, faded photograph

of a little child from his wallet—his child—who had died almost 50 years before.”

Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, [Luke: Volume 1](#) (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 261

Frankly, no matter how old we get, we never get over the sorrow of saying farewell. And the older we get, the more time we seem to spend saying farewell to believing members of our family and our Christian community.

We sorrow—in theses farewells—“yet not as those who have no hope,” Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:13, because we know that “Farewell” is going to be changed one day into “Hello again; there you are!”

On *that* day, there will be no more farewell.

How do we know that? What evidence do we really have?

Well, Jesus is going to demonstrate His ability to make that happen; He's going to reveal His power over death five different times in His ministry.

He's demonstrating this power as a down payment, so to speak, on His promise that He is indeed the resurrection and the life (John 11:25); that *He* is the commander of the cemetery.

And one of those demonstrations is about to take place.

Let's watch it happen here in Luke's Gospel and chapter 7.

Now we've just watched as the word of Jesus brought healing to the Centurion's servant. Now we're going to watch the word of Jesus bring someone back to life. Let's pick our study back up now at **verse 11:**

Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out...

Luke 7:11-12a

Now let's set the scene here before we go any farther into the text.

Nain is occupied to this day; it's now a tiny Arab village of around 200 people. There is no archaeological evidence to suggest that it was ever any larger than it is today.

Charles R. Swindoll, [Insights on Luke](#) (Zondervan, 2012), p. 171

The idea of nearing the ***gate of the town*** might lead you to imagine a fortified city with walls and gates.

But this village wasn't walled; its entrance was more than likely a typical near eastern entrance, perhaps nothing more than a decorative stone arch of sorts to indicate you had arrived.

Ibid

Nain wasn't known for anything. In fact, this is the only time it will be mentioned in the New Testament; this is possibly the only time Jesus visited there.

Adapted from R. C. H. Lenski, [The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel](#) (Augsburg Publishing, 1946), p. 402

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, mentions in passing that the town of Nain was on the way—in between—Galilee and Jerusalem.

Quoted in Ivor Powell, [Luke's Thrilling Gospel](#) (Kregel Publications, 1965), p. 166

In other words, it was a pit stop in your travels, one of those exits off the interstate with a gas station connected to a Kentucky Fried Chicken on one side and a Dunkin Doughnuts on the other, which is everything you could possibly need.

Nain was just a little town in between the busy cities of this generation.

It reminded me of the little town in Iowa where our youngest daughter and her husband and two children are living. The town is 352 acres, population just under 400.

And the name of the town is Middletown, creatively named because it's in the middle—it's in between—the two larger towns of Danville and Burlington.

In Middletown, there's one stoplight on main street.

When we visited out there the first time and Charity told me that she'd ordered pizza, I told her I'd go pick it up and I asked her where it was. She laughed and said, "It's a block over at the gas station." I wasn't very optimistic, I wondered if the pizza came with a bottle of Pepto Bismol.

It was good, by the way—made from scratch, homemade sour dough crust.

That's the town of Nain, a few dozen farmers and shepherds; if you stopped by the village of Nain, you were probably on your way to somewhere else.

I say that because Jesus must have a reason for pulling off the highway to stop in the village of Nain.

We're told here that He just so happens to arrive at the entrance, with the crowd of people following Him, just as a crowd of people are leaving town in this funeral procession.

They're on their way to take the deceased to one of the nearby limestone caves, cut into the hillside as burial chambers.

They didn't bury the dead underground but placed the wrapped bodies in caves and then rolled stones in front to protect them from wild animals.

So, these two crowds arrive at the same gate at the same time. And I need to just emphasize the fact that this was no coincidence. This is no chance encounter.

Nothing Jesus does is on accident; everything He does is on purpose. Even during extreme tragedy, like the death of a child, there are purposes that are not known fully to us *now* but will be known one day.

Look at this scene again in the first part of **verse 12:**

As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out.

Luke 7:12a

I love that: "Behold." That means, "Look." We would say, "Well, what do you know!" Jesus arrives at this very moment.



Is there any such thing as coincidence in your life? How has God shown you how He controls the big and small aspects of your life? What are some specific ways you have seen Him engineer your circumstances for His glory?

Let me tell you, this funeral happens to be *the* reason Jesus had said at some point to His disciples – "What do you say we run by the village of Nain?"

What's there? Most would have thought, "Nothing."

Jesus knew differently.

Go back and take a closer look at **verse 12 one more time:**

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.

Luke 7:12

As a pastor, over the years, I have been in some long funeral processions, driving to some cemetery. It's always meaningful to see people in the other lane slow down or pull over out of respect. Out in some rural areas, men will stop and take off their hats to show sympathy for the family and friends of the dead. I've seen some put their hands together to signify prayers on behalf of the grieving.

I hope you won't just speed on your way when passing a funeral procession but pull over and pray for those involved.

Now, in the days of our Lord, you wouldn't just pull over; you would turn around and join the procession.

Accompanying a funeral procession was a virtuous act of honor and respect.

Adapted from David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 302

And evidently the entire village has turned out for this occasion. They knew this woman, of course. They also knew this meant devastation and difficulty for her in the days ahead.

A widow now without a provider or protector was a great risk; tomorrow she will wake up by herself, not just brokenhearted but alone.

Hughes, p. 262

Typically, because of the climate, the deceased would be buried the same day they died.

Lenski, p. 398

The body had been washed and anointed with spices and then, most often, wrapped in a simple shroud or sheet, with the face covered with another cloth or napkin.

He would not have been placed in a coffin like we think of today, but on a bier—a stretcher of some fashion—carried on the shoulders of the pallbearers.

In these early days, often, long, wicker baskets were used for carrying the body to the grave.

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 88

This custom carried over into our own early American days on the plains where wood was scarce. I have seen photographs of this large basket—a wicker basket woven to hold the body until it could be buried.

From this early practice, an expression developed that we use to this very day when we refer to something or someone as a basket case. It means, they are beyond hope, they are beyond help.

This scene here is a basket case. The young man is a basket case because he's without life; his mother is a basket case because she's without hope, and she walks along here *weeping*—literally, “sobbing with tears.”



When you have been grieving, how has God comforted you? What verse, prayer, or promise from God have you clung to when life is hardest?

So just picture this in your mind: you have this large crowd of people in a funeral procession, and you have this large crowd of people following Jesus, and they meet—by divine purpose—at the gate at the same time.

One crowd is being led by the invisible prince of death, and the other crowd is led by the visible Prince of life.

And they meet, and let me tell you, this is nothing less than a collision of eternal significance.

If Jesus tries to do something about this and cannot, then we are all basket cases without hope; life itself is nothing more than a long and meaningless funeral procession to despair.

The apostle Paul was right when he wrote that “***if our hope in Christ is in this life only, then we are of all people to be most pitied***” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

This moment—at the entrance into the village of Nain—is eternally significant.

Now verse 13:

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.”

Luke 7:13

I love this: where does Jesus look first? At the basket? At the pallbearers? At the crowd? No, He sees her.

Luke says ***He had compassion on her***; that’s the strongest expression by the way, in the Greek language, for compassion or sympathy.

Barclay, p. 87

Jesus understood this moment in her life; He completely and comprehensively understood her. And He was moved to the core of His being over her sorrow.

You could translate this, “When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her; Jesus felt deeply for her.”

Hughes, p. 262

Jesus tells her ***do not weep***, literally, “stop weeping, stop sobbing.” Christians can misinterpret this text to mean that you shouldn’t cry at funerals because it shows a lack of faith.

Jesus isn’t saying to her:

- “Don’t cry—that means you’re not trusting God.”
- “Don’t weep—you will see your son again one day.”
- “Stop crying—don’t you know he’s in heaven.”

No, Jesus Himself will cry outside the tomb of Lazarus. If He can, you can.

Here’s what’s happening: Jesus is effectively telling her, “Stop crying because of what I’m about to do; stop crying because I don’t want you to miss what’s going to happen next. I want you to see what’s about to happen. Look this way—watch this.”

Look at what the Lord does next, just the first part of verse 14:

Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still.

Luke 7:14a

Wait a second. Jesus, the Rabbi, the Teacher, the Messiah, has just become unclean having touched something related to a dead corpse (Numbers 11).

What’s He doing reaching out like this?

Notice, everybody froze; the pall bearers are stunned; the widow has stopped crying; the crowd is breathless.

Jesus has touched the environment of death and is now ceremonially unclean.

But not if there’s no one dead inside that basket.

I believe as soon as Jesus touched this basket, even as He reached out for it, life regenerated; life resurrected; life surged back into this young man.

You have miracle upon miracle; blood de-coagulating, heart beating, brain fully functioning, lungs operating; this young man is fully and completely alive.

*And [Jesus] said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.”
And the dead man sat up.*

Luke 7:14b-15a

Dr. Luke uses a medical term here for a patient sitting up in bed who’s been cured.

Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, [Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament](#) (Regency, 1976), p. 158

Imagine this: he’s up there in that basket, carried on the shoulders of pall bearers, where everyone can see, and suddenly he sits up.

That will stop the funeral procession.

Luke tells us that the young man began to speak. In other words, to confirm that this wasn’t some strange twitch of the body or nerve impulse or relaxation of the muscles that created this strange sitting up motion, he began talking.

I would love to know what he said. Since we’re told he was a young man, I imagine he said, “I’m hungry,” or “Hi Mom.”

Adapted from Hughes, p. 264

It probably included, “Get me out of this basket! Let me down!”

There's another tender moment here that would be easy to miss; **verse 15 again:**

And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

Luke 7:15

In other word, Jesus helped him out of that basket; Jesus no doubt helped explain what had happened; He helped unwrap the young man out of his shroud; I imagine the pall bearers and the crowd are too stunned to do much more that stand there in shock. And then, Jesus brings him over and gives him to his mother.

He reunited them—can you imagine?



What do you look forward to on the day you are reunited with dead loved ones in Heaven? What excites you most about that reunion?

Jesus will give us back to each other one day. That doesn't mean husbands and wives will remain married, but that special connection in life will certainly be remembered. You will no doubt see your spouse and probably say, "Ah, there you are, and don't you look magnificent."

To your child: "There you are at last; I've missed you; and now with all the

redeemed, we will all be together forever."

Luke ends this scene by telling us that the fame of Jesus just spread like wildfire throughout this region.

The crowd missed the greater point of course, this all had reminded them of the great prophet Elijah raising the widow's son to life. So, they concluded that Jesus was another Elijah, so to speak, a great prophet who also raised a widow's son.

But this was different; and if any of them went home and looked it up in their study Bible, they would have noticed that Elijah asked God why the boy's life had been taken and then Elijah had to pray three different times before the boy came back to life.

A stupendous miracle, no doubt, but Jesus just spoke the word "arise!"

This scene becomes a prophecy of that day when Jesus will come in the clouds and with a command—I believe it will be this verb "arise"—and the dead in Christ shall rise first, their bodies will be reconstituted, resurrected, and rejoined with their spirits which have been with Christ since the moment of their death, as the Bible says.

"To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" (**2 Corinthians 5:8**) or, as Jesus said on the cross just before He died, "Father, into thy hands I commit my Spirit" (**Luke 23:46**).

Can Jesus command dead bodies to come back to life? Yes—here’s the first installment!

When life—maybe your life right now—can be described as a basket-case; you feel hopeless, helpless, beyond remedy, remember, this scene is a parable of Christ’s power through life the arrangement of every circumstance in life, His power that reaches even beyond this life.

Let me make three final statements that I see here in this encounter.

Jesus considers no person or place to be unimportant.

Not even a widow in a little village in the middle of nowhere is unimportant to Him.

One author writes on this scene, “Christ illuminates the crevices of yet another small town, taking pity on yet another anonymous soul and defeating death [even] in a little place like the village of Nain.”

Seth Davey, [Heart to Heart Magazine](#) “Down to Earth” (Wisdom International, 2021), p. 20

Jesus considers no person or place as unimportant.

Jesus considers no case or circumstance to be impossible.

This was a basket case scene, no hope, no possible way out. And yet Jesus provides an illustration that instead of rescuing this widow before she suffered, He chose to rescue her after she suffered.

That may be your testimony, like most believers around the world today, who will be rescued from suffering and sorrow and difficulty only *after* having gone through it.

That’s what the apostle Peter meant when he wrote, **“After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace . . . will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Peter 5:10).**

Jesus considers no suffering or sorrow to be insignificant.

Christ is touched by the feelings of our infirmities (Hebrews 4:15); His nickname, so to speak, happens to be the Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53:3).

Jeremiah writes that ***His compassion is new every morning (Lamentations 3:23).***

He doesn’t overlook your sorrow; He enters it with you.

Think of it this way: it was true for this mother in the village of Nain and it’s true *for you*.

His heart goes out *to you*. He feels *for you*. His compassion is new every morning *for you*. That’s not just some ethereal Bible verse; that’s not just some divine attribute for out there; it’s an attribute of Christ for down here!

For you!

And then, one day, He will personally say *to you*: “Hello. Welcome out of that lifelong funeral procession; welcome to

this reunion, this resurrection life, and this joy in your new home forever.”

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