

Parents' worst nightmare is that their child dies before them. Carl Jung called it a period before the end of a sentence. It is a future that will be unrealized. You don't just move on from an event like that. You learn to live with the pain and comfort others with the comfort wherewith you are comforted of God (2 Corinthians 1:4<sup>i</sup>). Job knew that loss all too well. He lost all seven of his children in one blow (Job 1:19<sup>ii</sup>). The passage today deals with how Jesus feels about it and the hope He gives in these most painful of times.

*<sup>11</sup> Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him.* Luke 7:11 This account is not in the other gospels. Nain is six miles south-east of Nazareth. Without this account in Luke we would not know that Jesus raised three people from the dead. Three is the complete number signifying His power to raise anyone. At this time in Jesus' ministry there were many followers hoping He is the Messiah or at least a great prophet (Matthew 16:14<sup>iii</sup>). After the events in John chapter six, the number of followers diminished greatly until the last weeks (John 6:66<sup>iv</sup>).

*<sup>12</sup> 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 The town stopped to mourn the dead and the plight of this poor widow. Even in the funeral of the poor there were at least two hired flutes and a professional wailer. Loud cacophony of cries would have come from the crowd. They were taking him out of the town to the burial site. Jesus' crowd met the crowd from Nain.

Women were not considered able to make a living. Having no husband or male child, this widow would be destitute. This would also mean it was the end of the family line and therefore upon her death the property and home would go to others.

*<sup>13</sup> And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."* Luke 7:13 Luke refers to Jesus as "the Lord" for the first time in this gospel. Though all the gospels allude to Jesus as YHWH of the Old Testament, which is translated as LORD, only Luke and John use "the Lord" to refer to Jesus. This passage shows Jesus to be the Lord over life and death.<sup>v</sup>

The widow would have been in the front of the procession with the bier behind her. The body would have been laying in the open wrapped in a shroud. Though there was a large crowd behind her, she was alone. Life had suddenly taken a tragic turn. She had lost her only son long before it would have been expected. She would not wake him the next morning and prepare his breakfast as usual. She was now alone. She did not know how she would survive without him. **This woman represents for us every grieving soul who encounters Jesus at their worst possible moment.**

Jesus had compassion on her plight. The word "compassion" is something like our phrase, "gut wrenching." He understands the pain of the broken-hearted and hopeless (Psalm 34:18<sup>vi</sup>). His compassion feels deeply with us (Hebrews 4:15<sup>vii</sup>). When a loved one passes, when we have no support, when all seems lost, it is comforting to know our Creator feels with us. Not only does He feel, but He can do something about it.

Jesus knew it was God's will to raise this young man from the dead, so he told her not to weep. The weeping of others breaks the heart of the compassionate. Jesus was

encouraging her to have hope. But we see in the account of the raising of Lazarus that even Jesus weeps when those dear to Him have the life of a loved one cut short (John 11:35<sup>viii</sup>). He knew He would raise Lazarus, but He also felt the pain the world feels from the curse of sin that results in death (Lamentations 3:22,23<sup>ix</sup>). I fully agree with Kent Hughes assessment of Jesus' compassion: "*Jesus' extraordinary compassion was grounded in his sinlessness and selflessness. Whereas our sin and self-focus inhibit our ability to care, Jesus' sinless self-forgetfulness allowed the full exercise of his sympathy and pity.*" -Hughes, Kent- Preaching the Word – Luke, Volume I: That You May Know the Truth.

*<sup>14</sup> Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."* <sup>15a</sup> *And the dead man sat up and began to speak,* Luke 7:14,15a It is not surprising that upon seeing Jesus touch the bier those who carried it stood still for they would have thought it made Him unclean, according to Jewish law (Numbers 19:11<sup>x</sup>, 16<sup>xi</sup>). But Jesus is most holy and what He touches is immediately sanctified (Exodus 29:37<sup>xii</sup>). Then He gave the command. Just as centurion said Jesus only need speak the Word and his servant would be healed (Luke 7:7<sup>xiii</sup>), so now with His words He commands the dead to arise! Good thing He said "young man" or every tomb on earth would have opened (1 Corinthians 15:54,55<sup>xiv</sup>)!

The body of the boy was dead, but his spirit was alive and heard Jesus. This reminds us that when our body dies, we are not dead. Our spirit goes on living and can hear the command of Jesus. As his cold body suddenly warmed with the renewed beating of his heart and his eyelids sprang open, his muscles pulled him to a sitting position. I wonder what he said. If the stories of people revived after being dead gives us any indication, it was probably something like, "I'm back in my body! Wow! I could see all of you and I was leaving you behind and saw a glorious city before me, and then I heard the voice of this One call me back." Of course, that is only my conjecture, but there are numerous cases from those who have been resuscitated after being dead for even thirty minutes who testify of this. This was something more than that. While the Jews buried the dead the day they died, it took hours of preparation and time to hire the mourners and gather those who would attend. This was resurrection! And it declared that Jesus is the source and power of resurrected life! In John 11:25 Jesus declared, <sup>25</sup> ... "*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,*

*<sup>15b</sup> and Jesus gave him to his mother.* Luke 7:15b Jesus gave him to his mother may mean that Jesus helped him off the funeral bier and perhaps unwrapped the shroud and guided him into his mother's arms. He gave her back a living son who could care for her, marry and have children, and carry on the family line. Jesus turned tragedy into glorious joy. Can your mind's eye see the crowd suddenly grow silent with mouths open staring in awe at what was taking place, then suddenly erupting into exuberant praise? Jesus takes the impossible, glorifies the Father, and teaches us something about who He is as the Giver of Life. **He showed His heart of compassion and the heart of God toward the hurting.** Imagine joy of the day when we join our loved ones in heaven.

*<sup>16</sup> Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"* Luke 7:16 You would be gripped with fear if you saw the dead rise. It's not just that the dead are alive but that there is

someone present with power you have never seen and can't fully comprehend. It is an out of this world kind of experience. Normalcy is rocked, and it challenges your sense of what you believe (John 5:28<sup>xv</sup>).

*<sup>17</sup> And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.* Luke 7:17 Judea most likely refers to all of Palestine, and we read in other passages that people came from the surrounding nations to seek Jesus (Luke 6:17<sup>xvi</sup>). If there was a crowd with Jesus before this, imagine the people following now! Everyone would be asking for healing or to raise their dead loved one. But Jesus only did as the Father directed (John 5:19<sup>xvii</sup>). There are times when He healed everyone who came to Him, and other times when He picked out one person to be healed. There is no record of Him refusing to heal those who came to Him though the encounter with the Syrophenician woman suggests there may have been such cases (Luke 5:26<sup>xviii</sup>).

### **John the Baptists's Question**

*<sup>18</sup> The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, <sup>19</sup> calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" <sup>20</sup> And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'"* Luke 7:18-20 John the Baptist preached against Herod's sin of stealing away his brother's wife (Mark 6:18<sup>xix</sup>). In response, Herod had him arrested and imprisoned in the fortress Machareus. John knew his role was to prepare the way for the Messiah, but some of what he understood the Messiah to do was not happening. Where was the axe laid to the root of the tree? Where was the chaff burning with unquenchable fire (Luke 3:16,17<sup>xx</sup>)? Instead, Jesus is still proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor. The wicked tetrarch Herod has stopped John's work of preparing the way, and Jesus has said nothing. He knows that because John's disciples have visited Jesus' ministry and come back to tell him of the gentleness of Jesus and His care of the sick and needy. Jesus was still proclaiming good news to the poor, but how could it still be good news when John was imprisoned, and the powers of this world seemed to be in charge?

When Jesus began His ministry, He had given a hint to those who heard His message. He preached from Isaiah 61<sup>xxi</sup> on the anointing upon Him to preach good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, and freedom for captives, and prisoners of darkness set free. He stopped just short of the line that declares, "the day of vengeance of our God". Jesus knew this first coming was not the time for God's wrath.

Many of us feel like John the Baptist. Corruption in government, dictators starving their nations, persecution of Christians, abortion of millions, and those who perpetrate it appear so content. Where is God? How can He not act in judgment on all this arrogant wickedness? We might especially feel this way if we were in prison because, like John, we had preached the truth (Matthew 5:11,12<sup>xxii</sup>). The Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah speak of both His gentleness and His wrath. We would probably question as John did.

John's messengers came to Jesus and delivered his question. Are you the One who is coming, or is there another? The Qumran community believed in a two-person

fulfillment of the prophecies. If John had spent time there or been influenced by their teachings, he might wonder if Jesus was the priestly side and another was coming to be the kingly side of the predictions. He had seen the Spirit descend like a dove and heard of the miracles (Luke 3:22<sup>xxiii</sup>). There was no doubt Jesus had something to do with ushering in the kingdom of God. The question was a plea from John for a clarification of the prophecies.

Why didn't Jesus speak out against Herod imprisoning John? Why was He still proclaiming the good news of the coming kingdom? Jesus had a much clearer view of the kingdom of God in the hearts of men than John or us. He knew God reigns over those in authority even when they are evil. The kingdom of God is so much greater than the kingdoms of this world, that we don't have to bother with them. Let them be what they will, we have something so much greater to proclaim. Are we too wrapped up in politics? Do our political statements interfere with our opportunities to share the gospel?

<sup>21</sup> *In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.* Luke 7:21 Jesus was too busy to answer immediately. People had heard He could heal any condition and were coming to Him from everywhere the news had traveled. Just imagine if someone was doing that today. Hospitals around the nation would be emptied of those who were trying experimental cures, and they'd be waiting for their turn with that person. And can you picture the joy when people withering away with cancer are suddenly in full health, crippled arthritics are standing straight and looking in awe at their moving fingers. He was also casting out demons. Those not in their right mind are suddenly the person they once were. If the blind were healed today like they were before Jesus, there would be a pile of white canes and a lot of seeing eye dogs' halters. But the joy... it would be tangible as the healed and their family suddenly had their hopes fulfilled. Tears of joy would be everywhere, including in the eyes of John's disciples. That was Jesus' answer.

<sup>22</sup> *And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.* Luke 7:22 Jesus didn't rebuke John. He understood John's confusion regarding the two aspects of the Messiah. Instead, He told those disciples to go and tell him what they saw and heard. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk (Isaiah 29:18<sup>xxiv</sup>; 35:5,6<sup>xxv</sup>), dead are raised (Isaiah 26:19<sup>xxvi</sup>), and the lepers are cleansed! Those are physical signs that the kingdom had come. The restoration of sight, hearing, and lame limbs, and the dead raised, and the poor having the good news preached to them were all predicted by Isaiah to be the result of the Messiah's presence. Jesus' actions showed He was doing the very things that Isaiah predicted the Messiah would do. The Word of God confirmed that Jesus is the Messiah.

In the past, a few writers tried to make the point that miracle workers were common in Israel at the time. In reality, there is only the mention of a couple of supposed miracles that two different men performed. There is no record of anyone doing anything remotely equaling the numerous healings, exorcisms, and even raising the dead. Jesus stands alone in history as the one individual that could heal any condition.

This did not answer John's question of why there was no judgment, nor did Jesus offer any hope of release from prison. God doesn't always explain why things are not as

we think they should be. Knowing Jesus is the Messiah should be enough for us to simply trust Him.

<sup>23</sup> *And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.*” Luke 7:23 Indeed! When we don't get the answer to our prayers, are we sometimes offended? When God doesn't do what we think He should do, we have a choice to either trust Him or be offended. Jesus was encouraging John that he would be blessed if he continued to trust Him. This too was from a Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 8:14,15<sup>xxvii</sup> showing that the Messiah was both a sanctuary and a stone of offense, a rock that causes stumbling. John could trust that Jesus was his sanctuary or be offended. The former promised a blessing. John's ministry was over. He was going to his heavenly reward. That is much better. His suffering was soon ended by beheading. He entered that glorious realm to the applause of the departed saints.

We are going to go through times when we don't like what is happening like the widow of Nain and John the Baptist. In one case Jesus did the unexpected and relieved the temporary suffering. In the other case He seemed to do nothing except to say, “Trust in me!” The answer to our prayers can go either way. We may see Jesus do the miraculous, and we often do. Or it may seem He doesn't answer our prayers, at least in the way we would like them answered. Will we make Him our sanctuary to see us through, or be offended and angry that God doesn't do our will?

It is a sin sick world in which we live. We can go through those times offended at God and try to endure in our own strength or we can find our sanctuary in Jesus and rely on His comfort and strength. One way is faith in self. The other is faith in Jesus. We must choose which it will be for us. From what Jesus said in the next verses we can know that John made the right one.

Can we say now, before those things enter our lives, “Lord, you are good. You know all. Though I may not understand your hand, I determine now to trust your heart.” That's a prayer of faith. It's a commitment. I will leave this up on the screen and give you some quiet time to decide if you can pray this prayer, and then I will close with this prayer and if you choose you can silently pray it with me.

## Questions

- 1 What was the widow's plight?
- 2 Why was touching the bier significant?
- 3 What does this teach us about God's heart?
- 4 What was John's question? Was it doubting?
- 5 What did the disciples of John see?
- 6 Why were Jesus' actions an answer?
- 7 What choice was before John?
- 8 What choice is before us?
- 9 Why are these stories back to back?
- 10 Will you choose now to trust God's heart?

## **Jude 1:24-25 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, <sup>25</sup> to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> **2 Corinthians 1:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

<sup>ii</sup> **Job 1:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

<sup>iii</sup> **Matthew 16:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

<sup>iv</sup> **John 6:66 (ESV)**

<sup>66</sup> After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him.

<sup>v</sup> Perhaps Matthew and Mark were hesitant to use it as they were written first while apostles were still trying to persuade the Jews of Jerusalem to listen the gospel. Calling Jesus "the Lord" might have kept them from hearing the good news and made Jews even more hardened toward the new sect of Christians.

<sup>vi</sup> **Psalms 34:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

<sup>vii</sup> **Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>viii</sup> **John 11:35 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.

<sup>ix</sup> **Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;

<sup>23</sup> they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

<sup>x</sup> **Numbers 19:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> "Whoever touches the dead body of any person shall be unclean seven days.

<sup>xi</sup> **Numbers 19:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Whoever in the open field touches someone who was killed with a sword or who died naturally, or touches a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.

<sup>xii</sup> **Exodus 29:37 (ESV)**

<sup>37</sup> Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it, and the altar shall be most holy. Whatever touches the altar shall become holy.

<sup>xiii</sup> **Luke 7:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.

<sup>xiv</sup> **1 Corinthians 15:54-55 (ESV)**

<sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."<sup>55</sup> "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

<sup>xv</sup> **John 5:28-29 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice

<sup>29</sup> and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

<sup>xvi</sup> **Luke 6:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon,

<sup>xvii</sup> **John 5:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Luke 5:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen extraordinary things today."

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<sup>xix</sup> **Mark 6:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

<sup>xx</sup> **Luke 3:16-17 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

<sup>17</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

<sup>xxi</sup> **Isaiah 61:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;

<sup>xxii</sup> **Matthew 5:11-12 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

<sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Luke 3:22 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Isaiah 29:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> In that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Isaiah 35:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;

<sup>6</sup> then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

<sup>xxvi</sup> **Isaiah 26:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light, and the earth will give birth to the dead.

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Isaiah 8:14-15 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup> And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken."