

## **Our Compassionate God**

Luke 7:11-27

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In order to rightly understand the revelation of God in Christ, we must always guard against extremes. For instance, many today emphasize the authority and power of God to the neglect of God's compassion and mercy. On the other hand, others emphasize God's love, mercy, and compassion, but neglect his authority, power, and justice. In today's text, we are reminded that the divine authority and power of our Lord must never be understood apart from his compassion and tender mercies.

## **Our Spirit-Anointed Messiah**

The raising of this young man from the dead comes to us within the greater context of our Lord's mission which he announced at Nazareth, saying —

The Spirit of the LORD *is* upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to *the* poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to *the* captives and recovery of sight to *the* blind, *to* set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD (Luke 4:18-19).

The dawning of the Messianic age is also the dawning of the age of the Spirit in great power. But not merely for the sake of display, but to bring about the promised deliverance of God's people. We learned earlier that this deliverance is a trinitarian work. The *Father* spoke from heaven affirming Jesus as His Beloved *Son*, followed by the descent of the *Holy Spirit* upon him (Luke 3:21-23). This means Jesus carries with him the ever-present anointing of the Spirit to validate and fulfill his mission. The Messianic mission is decreed by the Father, and carried out by the Son in the power of the Spirit. Whatever the Son does is always in perfect unity with the Father and the Spirit.

This means the New Covenant age—the age of the Spirit—was inaugurated with the coming of Christ, and with it, the beginning also of a new creation, *in this present age*. We live, therefore, in a “now and not yet” state. But the “not yet” does not diminish the power and authority of Christ as presently reigning among his people in the “now.” He is in this very moment your mighty deliverer, and your compassionate High Priest who is able to save to the uttermost (completely) those who come to him (Hebrews 7:25).

### **“Are You the Coming One?”**

But the type of deliverance Jesus brought was not in accord with the expectations of the Jews. Indeed, it was not the type of deliverance even John the baptizer expected. A little further along in this gospel we read that John sent messengers to Jesus asking, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” (Luke 7:18-20). John expected the Messiah would immediately bring about the wrath of God upon the unrighteous and restore Israel to world dominance, and bring this present age to a close. But this was not happening. Instead, Jesus was curing many “of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind he gave sight” (7:21). And he was doing these things for *all* who came to him, not just the Jews. Therefore, Jesus sent the messengers back to John with this report,

Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me (7:22-23).

The Messianic credentials of Jesus involved the deliverance of God’s people, not on a political level, but from the powers of the evil one. Our Lord’s Messianic credentials were not derived from the High Priest or the rabbinic schools, but came from the deliverance wrought by the power of the Spirit. And only the “blessed” would not be offended in how Jesus was fulfilling his mission. And why were they considered blessed? Because they were given eyes to see and ears to hear Jesus as the promised One. The Jews expected power and signs in the exercise of justice upon the unrighteous, and especially the pagan Romans. And Jesus did exercise great power and miraculous signs, but grounded in mercy and compassion on the multitudes. The Messianic power of Jesus was displayed in compassion, not wrath. This led John and many of the Jews to ask Jesus, “Who are you?” In essence, they were asking, “You are not what we expected in a Messiah?” What is your expectation of Jesus? How do you view his ministry in your life?

### **The Revelation of Divine Compassion**

The grieving mother was accompanied by a “large crowd” from the city. It is not clear why they were following her, perhaps it was for support and concern for her. But there may have been another dynamic at work here. It is likely that many people interpreted her loss of both a husband and a son as the just punishment of God for some sin she had committed. We remember

Job's "friends" and how they assumed Job's suffering was due to some secret sin he had committed. In John's gospel, we read how the disciples wondered who had sinned that a certain man was born blind, the parents or the blind man himself; a superstition Jesus outright rejected and corrected (John 9:1-5). It may be that the widow herself wondered what she had done to deserve so great a loss of both her husband and only son.

Many people today question the goodness of God when they suffer a loss. Some conclude God is arbitrary and even cruel. What is worse, some preaching reinforces this view. But cruel and arbitrary is not the image of God revealed within the Bible. For instance, Psalm 85 tells us, "But You, O LORD, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth (Psalm 85:15); and "He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and full of compassion" (Psalm 111:4); "The LORD is gracious and full compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works" (Psalm 145:8-9); "Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23). These are but a few of the biblical references to the goodness of God under the Old Covenant.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus, the incarnate Son, perfectly reveals God as a compassionate deliverer: "But when He [Jesus] saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, for they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:24); "When Jesus went out He saw a great multitude and He was moved with compassion for them, and healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14). Our Lord's parable of the Samaritan focuses on the compassion shown to a victimized Jewish traveler (Luke 10:33); and his parable of the prodigal son tells us of a wayward son being received again by the father with compassion (15:20). In his "Sermon on the Plain," Jesus speaks of God the Father as "kind" and "merciful" (Luke 6:35-36). There is no biblical warrant for ever thinking of God as arbitrary or cruel. Our text is one more witness to the true nature of God as compassionate and merciful.

## **The King Commands Life**

When Jesus saw the funeral procession, he felt compassion for the mother. Notice also how Jesus did not ask her (let alone the dead man), “Do you want your son back?” During his ministry there were times when Jesus asked people what they wanted from him, but this was not one of those instances. Instead, Jesus *commanded* the mother, “Do not weep.” Let me say that again: he commanded her, literally, “Stop weeping.” He then stopped the procession and issued another command, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” The crowd was witnessing the Son of David, the true King of Israel, exercising sovereign authority over his subjects. Not even death could resist his command. But what I want you to note here is that his commands are grounded in compassion. When Jesus saw the grieving mother, he felt compassion. The kingdom of God has come to this poor widow, and it is a kingdom of compassion and mercy.

And please note: Our Lord’s display of compassion was compelled *not* by the good deeds of the mother, nor by the offering of money to the temple, but solely on the basis of divine compassion. In perfect unity with the will of the Father and the life-giving ministry of the Holy Spirit, Jesus *acted* in compassion. This tells us also the compassion of God is not passive. God does not merely feel bad for you; rather, the compassion of God is active, it comes with power to deliver. Just minutes earlier, this widow was steeped in grief. Now, the Lord Jesus gives her son back to her—the dead man is now alive by reason of our Lord’s unquestionable power—power compelled by divine compassion.

## **Christlike Compassion**

It must be noted here also that Christians are to be people of divine compassion. Genuine, saving faith is accompanied by genuine, *acts* of compassion for others. The New Testament is vividly clear that those who say they are in Christ, must also do as he did (John 13:15; I Peter 2:21-22; I John 2:3-6). Therefore, we approach the world, and especially those in the church, with mercy and great compassion. Many people want authority and power, but they lack the compassion necessary to rightly exercise it. They earn credentials, adopt titles, and elevate themselves above others, but know little or nothing of the compassion of Christ. But there can be no true faith where there is no compassion for the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the sick, the weak, and those in need of daily necessities (James 1:27; 2:14-17; I John 3:16-17). Once again,

the compassion of God is active, not passive, and we too, as his children, must be *actively* compassionate.

### **God Has Visited His People**

We read these stories from the distance of time and space, and familiarity. This has the tragic effect of blunting the drama which has just unfolded in the text. Think of it. Jesus encounters a hopeless, grieving widow walking in another funeral procession. Earlier, she had buried her husband, and now she is on her way to bury her only son. The death of her son meant she was now all alone, with no visible means of support. A crowd of people followed along with her, none of whom was able to offer anything but sympathy. “Why, oh, why?” some may have cried out. Unlike our polite, quiet funerals in the West, first century processions in the Israel were marked by loud, wailing mourners. This procession was therefore quite a spectacle. “Where is our God? How can he allow such horrible things to happen to this poor widow?” The answer: God is here. Emmanuel; God with us. God has indeed visited his people, and he is not just staying for the weekend; he is never leaving. He has taken on human flesh and dwells among us in great power and compassion, especially for the weak, the vulnerable, and the poor. And yes, a great prophet had arisen among them, but more than a prophet, the long-awaited Son of David, and his life-giving reign had begun, and he shall reign forever and ever. Hallelujah!

### **Freedom from the Fear of Death**

The key figure in this text is, of course, Jesus himself. Luke is revealing Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, filled with the power and *compassion* of the Spirit. When Jesus encounters you, there is no despair, no terror, no disease that can resist him. Not even the grips of death that can stand against the power of Christ. The question is this: Do you believe Jesus feels compassion for your situation? Does the Jesus you worship possess the power to deliver you from among the walking dead and into new life? Or is your religion the kind that only offers sympathy and wailing like those of the crowd following the widow. Does your God only care from a safe distance, or does he come to you in the midst of your pain and loss? Our text tells us God took on human flesh and lived among us so that we might know him, and experience his compassionate, saving power in our lives. And the Bible teaches Jesus Christ is the same

yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He possesses no less power to save and command the dead today than he did that day in our text.

The question is: Do you believe? The Bible says Jesus has destroyed him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and released those who through fear of death were subject to bondage all their lives (Hebrews 2:15). Death is no longer a threat for those in Christ. Do you believe this? Many people think of Jesus as simply resting at the right hand of the Father, detached from the cares and sufferings of his people. But the Bible teaches Jesus is our active High Priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses, and that we should come boldly to the “throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16, see I John 2:1-2; Hebrews 7:24-8:2).

### **Christ’s Compassion is for You**

We have all experienced the loss of a close friend or loved one. It would even seem at times that death reigns—but it does not. The Lord of life reigns. And those who are in Him by faith alone, find peace and comfort even when suffering loss. Christ comes to us with compassion and mercy. “I will not leave you as orphans,” Jesus said, “I will come to you” (John 14:18). His compassion is not confined to this gospel narrative or for someone other than you; Christ’s compassion is for *you*. Whatever it is for which you are grieving. The loss of a loved one. The loss of your health. The loss of employment. The loss of friendship. Christ comes to you this day with great, active compassion. He reminds you that He is Lord over all, and we can rest in him and in his purpose for us. He is worthy of our trust. **AMEN.**

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