

The Compassion of the King

Luke 7:1-50

Someone once defined compassion as “*your pain in my heart.*” This must have been Jesus’ experience as He finished preaching the Sermon on the Plain because after He finished the sermon He walked into the depth of the brokenness of God’s people.

Remember how He concluded the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6:46-49. These next four stories in Luke 7 depict how storms of life will beat on the lives of people. The brokenness of this world will test the foundation of your life and may even cause you to despair. So, when you are diagnosed with a horrible disease like cancer or you have a child with birth defects or you’re standing beside the casket of a loved one or drowning in a sea of doubt because of the sins of your life, it is in these moments you will wonder if God is really for you. You will wonder if you really believe the gospel. Yet . . . it is in these moments we need the compassion of the King to breathe the air of hope into the lungs of our lives so that we do not drown in a sea of despair.

Jesus is the King who showed divine compassion to His people by giving them hope in Him. He did not simply tell us how to live but He stepped into our diseases, our death, our doubt, and debt of our sin to give us hope in the middle of the brokenness of this world. Jesus was more than a good teacher, He came as God in the flesh. He walked this earth and tasted the brokenness of this world so He could give the hopeless hope.

The Savior jumped into the sea of our despair and rescued us. He swam to the bottom of the sea where we had been crushed by weight of death and despair. He rescued us from the Marianas Trench of despair, brought us out on the dry land, pumped the water out of our lungs and breathed life into our bodies. Disease, death, doubt, and the debt of sin are no match for the King of Compassion. Main point: *The compassion of the King rescues us from the despair of this broken world.*

1. The compassion of the King is our Rock when we are hit by the storm of disease (vv. 1-10)

In vv. 1-5 we find a Roman centurion who had heard about Jesus and he asked the Jewish elders for help in order to save the life of his servant. A centurion was a Roman army commander of about 100 men. The Jewish elders had very little love for the Romans and in particular for their officers because they typically abused the people they were given jurisdiction over. Yet, the elders commended this officer to Jesus.

This Roman centurion was different. He actually cared for the Jewish people in Capernaum. He had even built them a synagogue. Not only did he love the Jewish people of Capernaum but he also loved his servant. Not only did he love his servant but he was humble.

Romans were not known for displaying humility, especially before their Jewish subjects. For a Roman commander to approach the Jewish elders and ask for help would have been humiliating. Yet, for this man it was not. He loved the Jewish people, he served them, and loved his servant enough to ask Jesus to save him.

In vv. 6-8, we see just how humble the centurion was. Not only did he approach the Jewish elders for help but He also felt he was not worthy to have Jesus, a Jewish rabbi enter his house.

It is easy to be impressed with the centurion’s love for others and his humility but the truly remarkable thing was the centurion’s faith in the authority of Jesus. This was what made Jesus marvel. In true humility and genuine faith, the centurion said that he was not worthy to have Jesus come to His house so he sent word to Jesus to simply “*say the word*” and his servant would be healed.

Verse 9 says that Jesus marveled at the soldier’s faith. Think about it. This was a Gentile man who had very little spiritual instruction in the word of God and yet he had faith in the word of Jesus. The only other

time Jesus marveled at faith was when He delivered the Gentile woman's daughter from a demon. On the other hand, in Mark 6:6, Jesus was amazed at the Jews' unbelief.

We need to notice the difference between how the centurion asked Jesus for help and the way the Jews asked Jesus for help. The Jews wanted Jesus to help the centurion based on his merit. The centurion simply looked to Jesus and the authority of His word.

We learn something very important about faith in this text. The fact is we all have faith in something. You may think you do not have any spiritual faith but the truth is you have faith in something. It may not be in Jesus but it is in something.

Look in v. 4 and we will see the Jewish elders' faith, *"And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, 'He is worthy to have you do this for him.'"* The elders placed their faith in merit not in Jesus. Notice they said, *"He is worthy."* Merit was the foundation of their hope. This was the foundation that they had built their hopes on in life. Newsflash! Your merits and achievements are no foundation on which to build your life. They will not stand the storms of life nor will they stand in the final judgment.

But in vv. 6-7, notice what the centurion said, *"Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ⁷ Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed."* The centurion's faith was in Jesus and the power of His word. So, when the storm of disease hit his family, he turned to Jesus not because he thought he had been a good and faithful man, worked hard and loved others and even built a church but because he knew Jesus to be a compassionate King who had the authority to save his servant.

I want you to notice one more thing about faith—the opportunity for faith. The centurion didn't call for Jesus until there was a problem in his life. The storm caused him to dig deep and find the Rock on which to build his life. Suffering and the brokenness of this world give us opportunities to abandon faith in our own efforts and merit and dig deep in order to build on the Rock of Christ.

Application: Sometimes we will be both the elders and the centurion in this text. At first, we will bargain with God when suffering comes. We will say things like, *"But Lord look at all the things I have done. I don't deserve this suffering or my loved one does not deserve this suffering."* When we think like this the foundation of our lives is exposed because we have built on sand. We think our merit will withstand the storm but it won't.

Secondly, sometimes we will be like the centurion and we will not send for Jesus until there is a problem in life, like someone is about to die. There is nothing wrong or shameful about turning to Jesus in times of crisis. This is actually what we should do.

Then there are people who are skeptical of those who find Jesus when they are in the hospital or next to the death bed or after a tragedy. The fact is we are built to know God and when the storms of life beat on our lives we will begin to ask the right questions. The vague emptiness of life can be ignored when things are good but it cannot be ignored when things go badly.

Tragedy does not create the need, it only reveals the need. Think about it this way, lightning will occasionally come out of a blue sky, but not very often. Lightning usually comes out of a cloudy sky. Likewise, faith and illumination can come out of the blue but most often it comes out of the pain of a cloudy sky. It is in the *cloudy-sky pain of life* that we realize we need the compassion of the King and need to build our lives on the Rock of Jesus. It is also in that moment that we realize that it was not the tragedy that created faith but that the faith is a gift of God.

2. The compassion of the King is our Rock when we are hit by the storm of death (vv. 11-17)

After Jesus left the Capernaum He went to a town called Nain. Nain was about twenty-five miles from Capernaum so that was about a day's journey. Jesus had not been requested to be in Nain, He and His disciples were just traveling and that was where they went next. As they entered the town, Jesus and His disciples met a crowd of mourners grieving and preparing to bury a widow's only son. There are four special meetings in this story.

First, two crowds met. It was not a coincidence that Jesus arrived in Nain at the moment the crowd was headed to the cemetery. This was the providence of God that put Jesus and His disciples in the path of the funeral procession. The compassion of the King always arrives precisely when it is needed most and not a moment too soon or too late.

Verse 13 says that when Jesus saw the grief of the widow He had compassion on her and said to her, "*Do not weep.*" It was not that it was wrong for her to weep. This was the death of the widow's only son and she should have been grieving. He told her to *not weep* because He was about to turn her mourning into joy. Hope had arrived and it arrived in Him.

I remember after my dad (my step-dad) died, my mother would often cry about his death. She would tell me that she needed to stop crying and that she would be okay. On more than one occasion I had to tell her that it is okay to grieve and mourn my dad's death. Grieving is good. Jesus is near the broken hearted.

Friends, if you are sad over the death of a loved one then lament and grieve. That is a good thing. I think sometimes as Christians we want to talk about living in Jesus' victory over death but then deny ourselves the gift of grief. Jesus a compassionate King and your pain is in His heart so grieve.

Here is what I want you to see about these two crowds. Spiritually speaking you and I are in one of these two crowds. We are in the crowd traveling with Jesus taking the good news to others as we make our way to the heavenly Jerusalem or we are in the other crowd overcome by the hopelessness of death.

If you have trusted Christ, then you are in the crowd traveling the road of life taking the hope of the gospel to those who are trapped in death. We are sent out each week from this crowd to be ambassadors for Christ in this world.

However, if you have not trusted Christ then you are in the other crowd because you are dead in your sin. You are being carried to the spiritual cemetery to be buried under the wrath of God. You need Jesus to raise you from spiritual death and believe the gospel.

Second, we see that two "only sons" met. One son was alive and destined to die and the other son was dead but destined to live. The Only Son of God was providentially there to speak life into the dead, "*only son*" of the widow.

Friend if you are here this morning and you have never trusted Jesus then you are encountering the Living, "*Only Son*" of God in the preaching of His gospel. May the Eternal, Only Begotten Son of God call you to spiritual life this morning.

Brother and sister in Christ, where is it that you have been sent to be the hands and feet of Jesus? We are sons and daughters of God taking the *Only Son of God* to a spiritually dead in this world. We are the aroma of life to some as they hear the voice of Christ and are saved. But for others, we are the stench of death, yet, be of good cheer for Jesus has the authority to give life to the dead.

Third, we see that two sufferers met. Jesus the "*Man of Sorrows*" met the widow who had lost her only son. She was in deep grief and left alone in a society that did not have the resources to care for her. Her only son was to be the resource to care for her. Life seemed hopeless. Then she met the *Man of Sorrows, the*

Only Son of God who is the source of life. He calmed the storm in her life when He raised her son from the dead.

Brothers and sisters, it is when we are sitting in those little chairs under the little tent in the cemetery and looking at the casket of someone we love that we begin to wonder if the gospel is real. It is when death comes in like a storm that we learn on what foundation our life is built. I pray you have dug deep and laid your foundation on Christ. And while death is still our enemy what we know is that Jesus has defeated death and because He defeated death, there is no limit to our comfort. Death does not have the final word, Jesus does.

Fourth and final meeting is between two enemies. Jesus faced His ultimate enemy—death. When you consider the pain and grief that death has caused in this world, death is indeed an enemy. Yet, Jesus had only to speak the word and the boy was raised from death to life.

Yet, the full defeat of death was yet to come. After Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, Jesus ultimately defeated death.

So, yes there will come a day when we will stand under the small tent and sit in the little chairs next to a casket of a loved one that is about to be lowered in the ground. This will be a painful moment and we will most likely carry that pain with us the rest of our lives. Yet, death does not have the final word if you have trusted in Christ. Jesus has the final word and at His word on the last day when He returns He will call to life all of those who belong to Him. He will give them new bodies and new lives in the new creation and death will be no more.

However, that does not mean we do not have any comfort now. Jesus has not left us without comfort while we wait for His return. He says that while we wait He has sent us the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to dwell in us until that day. He will comfort us in our pain. Weeping may remain for a night but joy comes in the morning.

Also, Jesus calls His church to surround one another with love and support while we all groan together waiting for our final redemption. His comfort will be of such a nature that we will glorify God as the people did in v. 16.

3. The compassion of the King is our Rock when we are hit by the storm of doubt (vv. 18-35)

- In vv. 18-20: John's Confusion about Jesus

Doubt is not always a sign of unbelief. Sometimes it is but sometimes it is not. In John's case it was not unbelief. He believed the Messiah was coming. John believed but because of his suffering and absence he had become a bit confused.

Although John had confessed that Jesus was the Lamb of God, since that time, he had been arrested and put in jail. Harsh treatment and suffering can sometimes cause us to question our faith. John did the right thing in his confusion, he took his question back to Jesus: *"Are you the One who is to come?"*

Brother and sister, there may be times in our lives when the storms will beat on the house of our lives to the point we will be confused. We may wonder if we have dug down deep enough. You may have questions or doubts.

It is the rebellious who simply walk away in unbelief. They do not take their confusion and questions to God. Yet for some of us it may seem our faith is weakening. Listen closely, the foundation of your life is not the strength of your faith but the strength of the object of your faith—the Rock—Jesus Christ.

So, when seasons of confusion and doubt come in like a storm; lament the season of suffering but keep digging down deep to make sure you are built on the Rock of Christ. It was in a season of suffering

that Peter told the persecuted church in 2 Peter 1:10, *“Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.”* It will be the continual reminder of the gospel and the continual digging into the depth of the gospel in those days that will give you victory over doubt.

- In vv. 21-23: Jesus’ Confirmation of Himself

Notice what Jesus said in these verses. He did not give a straight answer of *yes* but instead answered John’s disciples with Scripture. Jesus referred to prophecy about the Messiah and then applied Luke 6:43-45 to His life. He wanted them to see the fruit of His ministry. Only the fruit of His ministry would validate the truth of His ministry. Jesus laid out for John the fruit of what was prophesied about His ministry.

Here is how we need to apply this: *Faithfulness to the fruitfulness of Jesus’ ministry is our fruitfulness.* Numbers are a big deal in Christian ministry. Yet, numbers are not the sovereign indicator of fruitfulness. Faithfulness is fruitfulness.

If numbers were an indicator of fruitfulness then Jeremiah the prophet would have been a failure. If numbers were an indicator of fruitfulness even John the Baptist would not measure up. John had a few disciples but he had also been put in prison. If numbers were an indication of fruitfulness then Jesus needed to take back what He had just said in Luke 6:22-23, *“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ²³ Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.”*

Many missionaries labor faithfully in hard places and see very few conversions but their fruitfulness is not measured in numbers, it is measured in their faithfulness.

God sovereignly determines the response to the gospel ministry. Some sow and others water. Let’s strive to be faithful to the gospel as a church and as God’s people and let our fruitfulness be seen in our faithfulness.

- In vv. 24-30: Jesus’ Commendation of John

- The way Jesus commended John’s ministry seems to indicate the people may have been doubting John’s ministry because he was in prison. They may have been wondering how he could be such a great prophet if he was in prison. But Jesus tells the people John was a great prophet and even the greatest of prophets because he was the prophet that the prophets said would come to pave the way for the Messiah.
- Faithfulness is fruitfulness and John was faithful to the very end. May it be so with us when doubt creeps into our hearts and death is certain. Let’s let Jesus validate the fruitfulness of our ministry as a church and not compare with other churches or other preachers or even our denomination.

- In vv. 31-35: Jesus’ Condemnation of a generation in unbelief

It is the childish who are never satisfied with the gospel. The people said John was wound too tight and Jesus was too loose. Verse 34 is the key to understanding this text, *“Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.”*

Wisdom judges rightly and sees the good fruit that is born. Wisdom builds on the rock of the gospel for wisdom has its beginnings in the fear of God.

4. The compassion of the King is our Rock when we are drowning in the sea of the debt of our sin (vv. 36-50)

- Verses 36-38: The picture of one who has been truly forgiven.
- Verses 39-43: The parable of one who has been truly forgiven.

- Verses 44-50: The proclamation of one who has been truly forgiven.

What is the fruit of the life of one who has truly been forgiven?

- The fruit of faith: Those who have been forgiven have faith in Jesus (v. 50). These four stories (vv. 1-50) are bookended by two stories that emphasize faith in Jesus.

Faith is not mentioned in the story about the widow's son and doubt is implied in John the Baptist's story. The Apostle Paul helps us understand the nature of faith in Ephesians 2:8-9, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*"

What we learn from this text is that the grace is a gift and the faith is a gift. It is all a gift from God. The centurion could not boast about his faith or that would have been merit. The dead man could not boast about his faith for he was dead and raised to life. John could not boast about his faith for doubt had crept in during his suffering. The woman could not boast about her faith for her sins were so many that she felt like she was drowning in the sea of the debt of her sin.

Well you may object by saying *that Jesus marveled at the centurion's faith* and Jesus said in v. 50 that *the woman's faith saved her*. What do we do with texts like this that seem to contradict that faith is a gift?

Think about it this way. If I give you \$40,000.00 to go buy you a new car and you go and buy a car. Was that your money and is it your car? Yes, it is. I gave you the money. The money is yours and the car is yours.

Faith works the same way. Jesus gives us our faith and it is ours. He calls us from spiritual death just like he called the boy from physical death and then gives us faith to trust in Him. The calling is a gift of grace and the faith is a gift of grace. We did not merit any of that. It is all God's grace and Jesus marvels at that.

It is beautiful for Him to see His children believe in Him. It makes Him happy to see us love and trust Him. Hebrews 12 says for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross. Part of that joy was the faith He purchased for us and Jesus rejoices in that.

- The fruit of treasuring Jesus: Those who have been forgiven treasure Jesus above all else (v. 47). The woman understood she did not deserve forgiveness or the faith to believe in Jesus. She knew her sins were many. Jesus became her greatest treasure.
- The fruit of boldness: Those who treasure Jesus will be a bold risk taker for the sake of the gospel (vv. 36-39). Look back one more time at how she responded at the gift of faith and forgiveness. She became a risk taker to worship Jesus. She went against the cultural norms of the day.
- The fruit of extravagance for the sake of gospel: Those who treasure Jesus will be extravagant for the sake of the gospel (v. 37). She gave all she had to Jesus.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, survival experts tell us that when someone is stranded alone in the wilderness they need at least four things to survive: shelter, water, food, and hope. There are lots of stories where people have floated in the open sea and survived for weeks without water or lived for weeks without food and yet survived. Hope kept them alive. Without hope, we will drown in a sea of despair. The brokenness of this world and the difficulties of life all too often pull its victims under with it.

Friends, the person and work of Christ is not simply a life preserver on the open sea of despair—it is rescue. After Jesus preached the *Sermon on the Plain*, He walked into the brokenness of our world. He did

not shield Himself. The King of Compassion stepped into our world armed with hope. He was not armed with “the crossing of the finger’s kind of hope,” but He brought faith to all who trust in Him. The hope and compassion of the King says, *“You show me disease and I will show you healing on the cross. You show me death and I will show you resurrection. You show me doubt and I will give you faith. You show me the debt of your sin and I will show you the righteousness I earned by fulfilling the Law of God perfectly and then dying on the cross to pay for your sin. Your debt is not only paid but you now have the riches of my grace as your inheritance.”*

The person and work of Jesus Christ is the heart of Thanksgiving. He has not left us alone to be broken by sin. Brothers and sisters, the gospel reminds us that even in a world drowning in a sea of despair, because of the gospel, God is for us. Don’t let the brokenness of this world darken your hope in God, look to the cross and the God who raises the dead and believe that God is for you. The question is: Do you believe God is for you?