

Guest Preacher - Rev. James Maciver

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Well, let me draw your minds for a little time now to Luke chapter 7. That passage we read in Luke chapter 7, from verse 11, down as far as verse 17, this miracle where Jesus raised his widow's son, who, as we read, was being carried to his place of burial, and yet Jesus raised him, brought him back to life, and gave him back to his mother.

Now, Christ's resurrection, his own resurrection from the dead, is inseparable from the resurrection of his people in him and through him.

You find that so often throughout the Bible mentioned, don't you? Romans chapter 6 and verse 5, for example, tells us those who are united to Christ are united to him in his death, but also in his resurrection.

They were united to him when he died the death of the cross, and they were united to him when he rose from the dead, and they continue to be united to him, as they will be forevermore in a spiritual way, united in an inseparable way from his own resurrection.

And how well that's brought out for us in the chapter in John, chapter 11, which deals with that other great miracle of raising Lazarus back from the dead, where Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me shall never die, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.

[1 : 37] And then, of course, he asked Martha this telling question, do you believe this? And she said, like I hope we would all be able to say, yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world.

And so, in that and many other passages, we find that wonderful, inseparable connection between Christ himself in his resurrection and that resurrection of his people.

And indeed, as we'll see, I hope, through this miracle in Luke chapter 7, there is here, in a sense, a preview of resurrection life as Jesus brings this man back from the dead as he was being carried to his place of burial.

Three things we can just briefly look at. First of all, the context for this miracle in verses 11 and 12. He went to this town called Nain and his disciples and noticed there was a great crowd actually with him.

So, there were many people witnesses to what happened here and would carry that in their minds. Whatever effect it had, there were certainly witnesses of this miracle. And he came across this procession, this funeral procession, as he threw near to the gate of the town.

[3 : 00] And we're told then the context in these two verses of the miracle. And secondly, in verse 13, we can look at the compassion of the Lord.

When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, Do not weep. And then he followed up by this miracle where you find the conquest of death or the conqueror of death, Jesus himself.

Context for the miracle, the compassion of death. And the conqueror of death as he brought back this man from the dead and gave him back to his mother.

Well, here's the context, first of all. It's always important to look at the context because that helps us then to explain something of the meaning or see the meaning of what follows on in that context.

The other parts of the passage as they're described. The context is this widow obviously grieving the loss of her son. She was on the way with this procession to have her son buried.

[4 : 07] She would be at the head of this procession as the practice was in that day. And as they carried this dead corpse on the way to where they were going to bury him, it reminds us really of something important in terms of that widow's situation.

It doesn't say so much in the passage, but having been left like this, she was a widow. She didn't have her husband. He had died. Now she lost her only son. He had died, the only son of his mother. Luke's very careful in describing it in those details. Because being left without a husband and without now her son to care for her, this widow, this woman, would be in a very vulnerable situation. She would be in a situation very often in those days where her security was pretty much gone. Where she could be so easily exploited as they often were.

And you'll find teaching in the New Testament about the care the church would have to take for widows. Because in that society, they were actually rather vulnerable and frequently exploited. [5 : 15] And very often devalued by people who would look at widows in such a way as would just regard them in a prejudiced kind of way. And the opposite of this case is the case with Jesus.

And indeed, it's the opposite as you find the Bible teaching as well, or New Testament teaching especially, on how widows were to be regarded, not that it's absent from the Old Testament by any means.

But we find very often, you know, people saying, as you're well aware of this, I'm sure, that the Bible is actually responsible for devaluing the place of women in society.

That we have to go to the Bible and actually to try and find out where the fault is as to why women don't have certain places that are given to many, especially in the church.

Because you find from the New Testament quite clearly that the leadership of the church is not assigned to women, but is exclusively in the jurisdiction of male, of men.

[6 : 18] And people will say, well, that tells you the Bible's actually prejudiced against women. And this whole movement that looks down on women really has its source in the Bible.

That as you read the Bible and know the Bible is actually a piece of nonsense. It's not true. The women in Jesus' day, in these disciples' day, were exploited.

They still are throughout the world very often exploited and very vulnerable and very open to prejudice and to being used as this woman was vulnerable in that situation, as we've said.

But it's the Bible that actually has given the woman this dignified place that she has always had from creation. When God created Adam and Eve, He didn't say to Adam, now you have to look down on your wife because she's less important than you are.

She's of less value than you are. It's the opposite, actually. Whatever positions the Bible gives to people in the likes of leadership in the church is nothing to do with devaluing or demeaning women and their place in society or in the church.

[7 : 32] And as you look at the progress of the gospel and the teaching and the effect of the gospel down through generations, especially from the time of the Reformers onwards, you'll find that the teaching of the Bible that then brought out the place of women, whether it's in the church or in society, actually gave them the position that God intended.

Far from demeaning or devaluing them, it actually enhanced their position compared to what society itself had been giving to them over many years.

Well, that's by the way, but it's an important by the way, because when you come across that criticism of the Bible, when you know your Bible, you know that that's not valid, that that's not the case.

And here is Jesus actually showing us how much He valued this woman, how much He thought positively of this woman, a widow, and now having to live without her son.

As we live in a context, sadly, in our society, in our day, in our nation, in our island indeed as well, where issues of gender and of sex and of marriage and all of these things are debated or rather just put across in a way that, again, is very different to the Bible's view of them.

[8 : 56] We need to carry into our everyday lives and into our everyday contact with people what the positive emphases of the Bible is and are and try and put these across, not only the way we speak, but in the way we live ourselves to show that it's not the Bible's fault when people devalue each other and demean each other.

That's sin and the effect of sin and our sinfulness and fallenness, which the Bible is designed to address, to bring us to Jesus, to bring us to the God who mends, who heals, who gives life.

That's the context for the miracle. But secondly, look at the compassion of the Lord here in verse 33. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, Do not weep.

And the first thing that strikes you there is how immediately the compassion of the Lord was drawn out towards this woman. When He saw her, not half an hour after He saw her, not a few minutes

after He saw her, as soon as He saw her, His compassion was drawn out.

That's what it says. As soon as He saw her. When He saw her, He had compassion on her. It drew from His soul, from His heart, this compassion that He had and has as no one else has.

[10:33] This woman in her need, she didn't ask Him. She didn't come near to beg Him, to remember her. She didn't initiate this procedure that led to the miracle that brought her son back to life.

It was Jesus Himself all the way through that was in charge of the situation. It was seeing her and pitying her and her plight that drew this compassion.

And there's a very strong word, this word compassion. As we'll see in a moment in the Gospels, especially in the New Testament, it has a very deep meaning. But it's frequently in the case, the case in the Bible, isn't it, that the compassion of God, which is coming here through the person of Jesus, His Son, but the compassion of God is all the way through the Bible, all the way through the history of God's people in this world.

Let me just point out one or two places where you'll find it. Go back to the prophecy of Hosea. Hosea is a really interesting book.

I suppose every Bible, every book in the Bible is, of course, interesting. But one of the interesting features of Hosea is that it presents the relationship of the people of Israel to God by way of a marriage.

[11:53] God married them to Himself in covenant. They became unfaithful to that relationship to that covenant. They went after other gods, which God regarded as spiritual adultery.

And therefore, He sent the prophets like Hosea to preach to them and to bring this message of God's own indignation and displeasure for what they were doing.

But in chapter 11 of Hosea, you find a wonderful emphasis where God is saying of Himself that these people rightly deserve His judgment, His condemnation, His destruction of them, actually.

And He says, How can I exercise this fierceness of Mine? Will I make them like Zeboam, like Adma? These were cities of the plain along with Sodom that God destroyed.

How can I make you like them, God is saying? I will have compassion. My compassions, He says, are warmed within Me.

[13:03] You see, instead of coming out in judgment to destroy them, what God was saying was, My compassions, as they fill up My being, are directed towards you instead of destroying you.

For I am God and not man. God is like us. If God were like us, we wouldn't be here today. If God dealt with us the way that we often deal with other people, this would not be our circumstances today.

If God had actually given to us what you and I deserve because of our rebellion and sin against Him, well, you can see where we would be. But that's not how it is.

And just like Jesus looking on this woman drew out His compassion, so the Lord pities sinners like you and I in our plight.

He doesn't look on us and say, right, they've done that to themselves, I don't want anything else to do with them. No, He sent His Son into the world to die the death of the cross for the likes of you and I, sinners who have rebelled against Him and by nature are sinful, right to the depths of our soul.

[14:19] This is the God of the Bible. This is the God who is not, not the God who is distant and cold and unfeeling and disregarding of people and their plight as you often hear that accusation thrown against God when something happens in the world that people take note of, when people lose their lives, when there's some great disaster or other.

Where is God? What do you do with that? Where do you take these people with their objections? Well, it's difficult. There's no easy answer to it. There's no ready answer that will satisfy people who are very often prejudiced against God anyway.

But you take them to Calvary. You take them to the Son of God hanging on the cross. You take them to the sufferings of Jesus and the death of Jesus.

And you put the question back to them lovingly and say, well, where is God in that? Is God absent from that? Is that just about human cruelty and human debauchery?

No, it is God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should have eternal life.

[15 : 41] this is the God of the Bible. Oh yes, He's a God of judgment, of course. And the Bible doesn't hold back in telling us about the judgment of God and how He views sin and how the last judgment will be and what will be afterwards when people are divided into those who are saved and those who are lost into heaven and into hell.

But the overwhelming emphasis of the Bible is on God merciful, gracious, loving, kind, long-suffering, forbearing.

And that's an appeal really to you and to me today. To come to know this God for yourself if you haven't already. Don't look at the caricatures or listen to the caricatures or the opinions of the world. Go to your Bible. Go to Jesus. Here is this woman in her plight. Here she is with all her anxiety, with all her questions to how she's going to manage.

How's she going to manage now her only son has gone and her husband before that? Who's going to care for her? Who's going to give to her what will actually be important for her for her daily life?

[16 : 53] Jesus had compassion. When He saw her, He had compassion on her. And He said to her, Do not weep. Well, that compassion, as we said earlier, is a strong word.

It's a word that came from deep within the soul of Jesus Himself. It's not a surface thing. Jesus doesn't do what appears to be the case, but it's not reality.

He doesn't do pretense. This came from deep within Himself. That's the sense of the word in the text of the Bible. He had compassion on her.

It's a really strong movement within Himself, within His soul. You'll find something similar, actually, in John's Gospel. And again, it's a context of Jesus overcoming death in the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

What you find in John's Gospel chapter 11 and verse 33, when Jesus actually came to the vicinity where Lazarus had been buried, Mary said to Him, Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.

[18 : 09] When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with Him also weeping, He was deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled.

See these words, deeply moved in His spirit and greatly troubled. And He said, Where have You laid Him? They said, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. So the Jews said, See how He loved Him. But some of them said, Could not He who opened the grave, the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man from dying? Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb.

Why does John emphasize a number of times there, Jesus deeply moved. What is this deep moving of His soul about? Is it just mere sympathy with this woman?

It is certainly with Martha, with Mary. Is it mere sympathy that draws His compassion towards this widow in the town of Nain? Is it mere sympathy in the Gospel of John 11 where He looks at where Lazarus is entombed?

[19 : 12] What is it that really brings Him this great movement within Himself? Well, it's this. As He thinks and sees that Lazarus is entombed, as He sees this dead body of this man being carried to His burial, Jesus knows more than anybody else.

This human is what I created. Jesus was moved at Lazarus' grave, moved here because He is seeing this is what sin has done, this is what man has done, this is what human beings have done to themselves by the rebellion against God and brought death and judgment upon themselves. You can see that so clearly in Romans chapter 5, can't you, where Paul is making clear the connection between the sin of Adam, the sin of mankind in Adam, if you like, and the death that came upon all human beings.

and Jesus knows this. He's the creator of human beings and He sees human beings now in this young man in the grave of Lazarus instead of living life to the full entombed in death.

Friends, what a dreadful thing sin is. What have we done to ourselves in rebelling against God?

[20 : 58] Where are we in relation to the Bible's teaching today? Do we accept this? Is this not the case for you and me? That we need to come to know life through Jesus because until and unless that takes place, we're actually under the sentence of death.

Well, here He is and this compassion is drawn now to her and He says, Do not weep. Here He is, a compassion now, the conqueror of death where He comes and touches the beer and says, Young man, I say to you, arise.

Strange, isn't it? That He says to this woman carrying her only son to his burying place, woman, don't weep. Of course she was weeping. It's natural for her to weep.

It's important for her to weep. She's a grieving mother. She's a grieving widow. Weeping is not out of place in her circumstances.

Why does He then say, Do not weep? Is He criticizing her for weeping or for showing her grief? No, not at all. And when you and I need to weep, be sure to weep.

[22 : 13] And don't be scared of weeping, of showing your grief. It's something that's important for your soul. And here He is and He comes, Do not weep.

Why did He say, Do not weep? Well, because of what He was about to do. Don't weep because I have the power over death to bring your son back to life. She didn't say that in so many words, but He demonstrated that when He brought him back in a moment or two after that.

And that's why He's saying to me and to you today, Don't weep. Don't let weeping dominate your life. Don't let death dominate your life. Don't let sin dominate your life because that's been overcome.

Jesus has dealt with that. There's no reason for weeping in that sense as if death were still in control, as if the sin of mankind had not adequately and properly and significantly and permanently been dealt with by Jesus through His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

We have no place of despair today. No reason to despair. No reason to say that we too will not enjoy life and life to the full as it is in Christ.

[23 : 26] Do not weep. Then He came and touched the bier as what the corpse was being carried on. And that itself was significant because according to Old Testament regulations, you are not allowed to touch anything to do with death.

You're not allowed to touch a dead body or even this bier on which this dead body was laid and being carried. But you see, that's another way that Jesus is demonstrating, I am not like other people.

I am not bound by that regulation in that sense that when I touch this bier, I'm not defiled by it. I don't attract any condemnation to myself.

I'm here as the conqueror of death. I'm here to demonstrate that I have in my own capacity and power the means and the ability and the power to show that death actually is below my feet.

That I am its destroyer. That I've come to deal with it. And then He said, Young man, I say to you, arise.

[24 : 41] And the young man did just that. He sat up and began to speak. Now, what is that telling us? Well, it's telling us for a start that the Word of Jesus is creative of life.

We read in John's Gospel, the beginning of the Gospel, without Jesus, nothing that was made came to be made. He was there bringing all things into being at the beginning of the creation itself. And in the creation of life from the dead, it's in the hands of Jesus too. Indeed, that's why He came into the world to bring life. Instead of the death we brought on ourselves.

Young man, I say to you, arise. It reminds you, doesn't it, of that opening chapter of Genesis, where you find God setting about, bringing a structure and an order to the creation that He had brought about, where the earth was without form and void, darkness was on the face of the deep.

God said, let there be light. And there was light. There is the creative, powerful Word of God calling something into being that didn't exist until that moment.

[25 : 56] And He's calling here something into existence. That doesn't exist in this young man's case until Jesus calls it back into being. That's life. Life from the dead.

And there's an instant response. He spoke. He wasn't in a swoon. He wasn't unconscious. He was dead.

It's clear from the passage that he was dead. The dead man sat up. Remember, Luke was a skilled physician, skilled doctor. He knew what he was talking about.

He knew what he was seeing. He knew a dead body when he came across one. He knew the difference between somebody unconscious and somebody actually dead. And here is Luke demonstrating that this, in fact, was indeed the case.

Otherwise, he would have known very well if it had been some sort of manipulation. The dead man sat up and began to speak.

[26 : 58] Can you imagine being part of that great crowd and being in the vicinity of this procession, this beer, making their way towards where he was to be buried?

Can you imagine seeing this? What would your thoughts be? What would your reaction have been? Well, we're told the reaction of some.

They all glorified God, saying, a great prophet has risen among us, and God has visited His people. They attributed this to God, not necessarily that they were all saved through it, but they knew something divine had happened.

They knew the only source for this must be God. God has visited His people. A great prophet has risen among us. So when this dead man, when he sat up and began to speak, they knew that something remarkable had happened and knew Jesus was the source of it.

They knew He had brought this about, that He had caused this. There was no other explanation but that there was something divine that had happened in front of them.

[28 : 14] Same with Lazarus, isn't it, in John chapter 11, when He came to the grave eventually. Remember, four days had passed since Lazarus had died.

His body had been in that sepulcher for four days. And when Jesus came to the sepulcher, Lazarus, come out. What happened?

Lazarus came out, still bound with the grave clothes. And Jesus gave the order, release him, let him go. Take the grave clothes off him.

They're no longer appropriate. He's now alive. And here is this young man sat up and began to speak. It's a real miracle.

The dead has come back to life. And he has his faculties back. He's able to converse. He's able to speak. It's all through the power of Christ.

[29 : 21] The power of Christ's Word. The power of the conqueror of death. And then you notice, He gave him to his mother.

Isn't that just the most wonderful detail? He gave him back to his mother. What is that saying to us? It's saying to us that this is the concern of Jesus, not just to bring this man back from the dead for his own benefit, so that he will again live.

And it's not something even the Lord is to the glory of Christ, to the glory of God, though it is that ultimately, of course. There is this in the purpose of Jesus, in the mind of Jesus, all the way through. I need to give this young man back to his needful, his needy mother, because she's needy of him. It's a very practical touch, actually. And yet that's what Jesus does.

He gave him back to his mother. That's what Jesus is about. He reached into death. He overcame death.

[30 : 30] He brought this young man back out of death. As he reached into death and took hold of him and brought him back, he gave him back to his mother. There's the compassion.

There's the love of Jesus. There's Jesus' concern, not just to do things, but to do them for a purpose, to do them meaningfully.

He gave him back to his mother. And that's the concern of Christ. That's indeed a preview of resurrection.

That's a preview, indeed, I think that's emblematic, I think, and significant as something which is itself a means of showing us what salvation is about.

What is salvation? What is God's salvation? What is us being saved from our sins about? It's the Lord reaching into death, overcoming death, taking us out from death, and reestablishing us alive in Christ.

[31 : 34] Whoever believes in me, he said, shall not die, as he said to Martha, shall never die. That doesn't mean we will not die physically.

We will die physically, most of us, if Jesus doesn't return before that. Our body will be laid in the grave, returning to the dust, solemn thought as that is.

But for God's people, death is not the dominant feature, even of their bodies in the grave. Because the catechism, remember, reminds us of the teaching the Bible has as a whole.

Their bodies do rest in their graves till the resurrection. Beautifully put, they rest in their graves till the resurrection.

And then at the resurrection, they are raised to be with Christ forevermore. Because, you see, his concern is to give us back what we lost. To give us back the life that we gave away when we sinned against God.

[32 : 45] And to give us back that life through what he himself has done in his death and resurrection. That is why he died. That's why he came into this world.

That's why he rose from the dead. So the likes of me and of you as well would come to enjoy the life God designed us for in the beginning.

That's salvation. To take us out of death. To give us back to God. And to say, as it were, the Son of God saying to the Father, Father, I've reached into death.

I've gone into death for them. And as they are joined to me in the death I died, so they're joined to me in the resurrection with which I came back from the dead. And now I give them back to you.

That's what they were created for. Do you know that, Jesus, today for yourself? Do you have this life already?

[33 : 52] Do you know the one who is the resurrection and the life for yourself personally? It's wonderful to have this teaching. It's wonderful to have the privilege of preaching it, of hearing it.

But it's far more wonderful still to know the reality of it in your own soul that you are indeed in Christ, set above death forevermore, forevermore, spiritually, morally, death will not touch you in Christ because Jesus has conquered it for His people.

As the writer of the song, the gospel song put it this way, God sent His Son. They called Him Jesus. He came to love, heal, and forgive.

He lived and died to buy my pardon. An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives. Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.

Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know He holds the future and life is worth the living just because He lives.

[35 : 09] Amen. May God bless His Word to us. Let's pray. Lord our God, we thank You for the life that You brought about through Your own resurrection from the dead and for the death You died previously.

We thank You today for that held out before us in the gospel. And we bless You, O Lord, for the gift of faith that we might embrace You and embrace the life that we have in You.

And we pray that today Your Word will follow us and that we ourselves will make it our concern today to know that we too are amongst those who look forward to the prospect of resurrection life in Jesus, whatever happens to us in this world.

Receive us now, we pray, and pardon our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, our concluding psalm of praise today is Psalm 118.

In the St. Psalms version this time, Psalm 118. Psalm 118. That's on page 156. We're singing from verse 17.

[36 : 18] We'll sing Dennis Farris, verse 24. I shall not die, but I shall live. The Lord's great works I will proclaim. The Lord severely chastened me, but rescued me from death's domain.

Throw wide the gates of righteousness. I'll enter and give thanks to God. This is the gate of God, through which the righteous come before the Lord. And so on, verses 17 to 24.

I shall not die, but I shall live.

The Lord's great works I will proclaim. The Lord severely chastened me, but rest to thee from death's domain.

Through wide the gates of righteousness. I'll enter and give thanks to God.

[37 : 36] I'll enter and give thanks to God. This is the gate of God, through which the righteous come before the Lord.

You answered me, I will give thanks. Salvation comes from you, my Lord.

The Lord's great works I will proclaim. The Lord's great works I will proclaim. The Lord who can give thanks to God, His Son and I will hear from you, my Lord.

The Lord is the one that Has bisous and you who is no procure. Himself has an all this.

It is the marvel in our sight.

[39 : 04] This is the day the Lord has made. In it let us take great delight.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen.