“GOD HAS VISITED”

Luke 7:11–17

Key Verse: 7:16

“Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has arisen among us!’ and ‘God has visited his people!’”

Have you ever felt abandoned? It might have happened in childhood only briefly. Sadly, it could have been something more permanent. In all cultures, abandonment is one of the most common and painful human experiences. Regardless of the degree to which it happened, it can leave life-long scars. In chapter 7 Luke records the ministry of Jesus to people not included in society. We first saw a Gentile centurion; later we’ll see a sinful woman. In this passage we see a widow. No one had intentionally abandoned her, but in a sense, life itself did. People who witnessed what Jesus did for her saw a greater message in it. They exclaimed, “God has visited his people!” Their words tell us who Jesus is and what he still does for us, no matter how others may treat us. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his word today.

Let’s look at verse 11. The time is “Soon afterwards…” It was right after the centurion’s servant was healed. The next setting is a place called Nain, a small town about six miles southeast of Nazareth. The centurion’s house was in Capernaum; now Jesus is traveling with his disciples, and a great crowd is with him. To get to Nain is over 30 miles away, and they’re walking. On average we walk about 3 mph, so, nonstop walking would take ten hours. If they left right after sunrise, with brief stops along the way it would take the better part of an entire day, probably in the hot sun. Some might consider such a long walk as a kind of punishment. But the phrase “a great crowd” suggests people are excited to be with Jesus, eager to learn more and see what he will do.

Look at verse 12. They’re just drawing near the town gate, meaning they haven’t gone in yet. And what do they encounter? A funeral. It’s evening, the usual time for such an event. Most likely, the person had died earlier that day. It says “a considerable crowd” is there. In their culture, people would be wailing loudly. Some were even paid to do it. When encountering a funeral, people were not allowed to interrupt; they had to stop and watch in silence. What a contrast: the great crowd that had walked all day with Jesus, and, a wailing funeral crowd.

And who’s the person who just died? It says he was “the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.” Based on archaeological research, scholars estimate that at that time, the average family would have anywhere from four to eight children. Daughters who grew up to marry would have to serve in new families, whereas sons would inherit their father’s property and had the duty to care for the elderly parents, and in this case, the widowed mom. But this woman had a one and only son, so now she’s got no one to take care of her. Even if she could overcome the emotional toll of this loss, it would be nearly impossible to survive on her own. Widows often were taken advantage of and ended up begging on the streets. Not only her present but also her future looked bleak. As we might expect, Luke mentions widows more than any other Gospel writer (2:37; 4:25–26; 7:12; 18:3,5; 20:28,47; 21:2–3; see also Ac6:1; 9:39,41). According to their custom, this woman is walking ahead of the dead body of her one and only son to the burial place, with the crowd following behind.

Look at verse 13. Here Luke refers to Jesus as “the Lord.” Only Luke does this, and he does it frequently (7:19; 10:1,39,41; 11:39; 12:42; 13:15; 17:5–6; 18:6; 19:8; 22:61).[[1]](#footnote-2) “The Lord” refers not only to his authority but also to his loving presence. Unlike in the centurion’s case, this time Jesus takes the initiative. He’s probably never met her, but immediately he senses this woman’s situation. It says he “had compassion on her.” This Greek word literally means to feel pain in one’s bowels. It’s not a concept but a visceral, gut-wrenching emotion—to feel deeply for someone’s suffering. It also can mean to feel “affection” (2Co7:15; Php1:8; 2:1). Earlier, Luke used this word root to describe God’s “tender” mercy (1:78). Self-centered or immature people wouldn’t get it, but Jesus can feel this woman’s grief. In Luke’s Gospel Jesus uniquely tells two unforgettable parables about such “compassion.” One is about a good Samaritan who has “compassion” on a man found by the roadside who’s been robbed, beaten and left for dead (10:33). The other is about a scoundrel of a son who takes his inheritance early, squanders it in reckless living, comes home humiliated and broke, and yet his father feels “compassion,” runs and embraces and kisses him (15:20). Jesus wants us to be growing in such compassion, with its kindness, humility, meekness and patience (Col3:12).

He not only tells the woman not to weep but also gives her a clear reason. Look at verse 14. The “bier” was not a coffin but a plank of wood used to carry a dead body to burial. To touch it was unthinkable, because God’s law said it would make a person unclean for seven days (Nu19:11,16). But Jesus doesn’t hesitate. Once again he chooses healing over trying to stay clean (5:13,29–32). And once again, it’s the power of his word that does the impossible (4:32–36; 5:13,24–25; 6:10; 7:7b,10). This time, the word of Jesus brings a dead man back to life. The Greek word for “Young man” probably means a teenager or someone in his 20s, before marriage. The young man was dead, but the word of Jesus made him alive again. Look at verse 15. Though the young man is raised from the dead, the focus is again on his mother. Jesus did this miracle out of compassion for her.

Jesus raising this young man from the dead is saying something to us today. We all were dead in our sins; we had no strength to resist the devil’s spirit and our own passions and desires; but by his grace Jesus made us alive (Eph2:1–5). Jesus is the Lord of life (Ro14:8–9). His word can still bring life to the spiritually dead, to the most hopeless people (Jn5:24). And even in the midst of tragedy like this widow’s, Jesus gives us the hope of eternal life (Jn11:25–26). We still face death, but we don’t grieve like those who have no hope (1Th4:13–14). God knew how human beings suffer under the power of death (Heb2:14–15), so he sent his Son Jesus for all the people of the world. Our Savior Jesus abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2Ti1:10). The good news of his resurrection is still at work in people today.

The climax of the passage is in verse 16. Let’s read it together. Often Luke tells us how people respond with fear and awe at God’s mighty work (1:65; 5:26; 8:25,37; Ac2:43; 5:5,11; 19:17). He also repeatedly describes how after encountering Jesus, people end up glorifying God (2:20; 4:15; 5:25–26; 13:13; 18:43; Ac11:18; 13:48; 21:20a). What does it mean to “glorify” God? Simply it means to praise, thank and worship him. But the word “glory” also means “reveal.” God is clearly revealed through what Jesus did here. God is the Almighty Creator of the heavens and the earth (Ge1:1); with him, nothing is impossible (1:37). This great God revealed through this miracle of Jesus that he can surely defeat death. And, it looks forward to God’s promise, that one day he will swallow up death forever; he will wipe away every tear, and death will be no more, no mourning or crying or pain anymore (Isa25:8; Rev21:4).

The people’s words here also glorify God. They first say, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” When Jesus raised this young man to life, it was like when the greatest prophet Elijah did so (e.g. 1Ki17:17–24). People were praising God who sent Jesus, keeping his promise to send a prophet like Elijah (1:17; cf. Mal4:5). They also say, “God has visited his people!” They probably didn’t know yet that Jesus is God. They needed to know who Jesus is more clearly (9:18–20). But at this point, they’re sure that God has come through Jesus to visit them.

The Greek word for “visit” literally means to examine with the eyes, and it implies caring or being concerned. Luke uses this important word several times (1:68,78; 19:44; Ac15:14,36). For 400 years God’s people Israel had no prophet doing great things among them, as was true in former times. They felt God had abandoned them due to their sins. But now, God is doing great things among them again. It’s more than just miracles. People sense God is concerned. Jesus’ visit to this widow, full of sorrow at the death of her only son, then raising her son to life, shows that God really sees, knows and cares about our lives, including all the worst we might be experiencing. Of course God always sees everything, because he’s God. But since Jesus, God the Son, came to this world fully human, now God can “see” each one of us in an even deeper way. He understands us through personal experience (Heb2:17–18; 4:15).

Today it’s popular to say, “You don’t see me.” It means, “You don’t know who I am, that I’m even here, you don’t ‘get’ me, and you don’t really care, either.” Though people ignore us, God sees each one of us. He knows us. He values us. He understands us, including our sorrows, and he cares. It’s why he sent his Son. Only God’s visit in the person of Jesus can heal us.

As we all know, abandonment is painful. Sometimes we hear about parents who abandon their own children and never come back. Or about wives or husbands who suddenly abandon each other and disappear. It seems so cruel. Even a brother or sister, a son or daughter, or a seemingly close friend can abandon us, not only in a crisis, but even in having an ongoing normal relationship. If we experience abandonment in any way, we become depressed and hurt. It’s hard to recover. It can make us bitter and make us feel pretty hopeless. We all need our Lord Jesus who is ever present, who always sees us, who cares, and who is faithful to us to the end. We need to taste his compassion, his deep concern, and his power to give us hope.

As his people, we also need to go and see about those who are lonely or in trouble. We need to visit them and see what they need. Above all, we need to point them to Jesus, the one who cares for them most. We need to pray and ask God to help us, in the name of our Lord Jesus, to overcome being engrossed in ourselves and go and visit those who really need visiting.

Let’s read our key verse, verse 16 again. Praise God who has visited us through his Son to heal all our wounds and sorrows and give us the hope of eternal life. May God help us to glorify him, and go and visit those who really need his presence and his care.

1. See also Luke’s expression “the Lord Jesus” in Ac1:21; 4:33; 7:59; 8:16; 9:17; 11:17,20; 15:11,26; 16:31; 19:5,13,17; 20:21,24,35; 21:13; 28:31. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)