

WEEK OF APRIL 3, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Let your heart go out to those who are suffering; be tender-hearted and sympathetic.**

UNIT: Luke (Part 1)

THEME: Perfect Humanity

LESSON TEXT: Luke 7:11-23

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Peter 3:8; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

PERFECT COMPASSION

BY MARK SCOTT

In the 1964 Walt Disney film, Mary Poppins was “practically perfect in every way.” To describe Jesus, we must remove the word *practically* from that description, for he is perfect in every way (i.e., flawless, mature, and complete). A most obvious evidence of Jesus’ perfection is his compassion. His heart just goes out to people.

After Jesus concluded his famous Sermon on the Mount, he encountered a Roman soldier. The centurion wanted Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus granted the soldier’s request. The centurion stood in stark contrast to the woman in our text. He was a Roman, and she was a Jewess. He was a male, and she was a female. He was the backbone of the Roman army (i.e., important), and she was destitute and disenfranchised. But she needed Jesus’ compassion.

Compassion to the Needy

Luke 7:11-17

Luke used the loose temporal phrase *soon afterward* to connect this narrative with the previous one. Jesus was entering the Galilean town of Nain. This small city was in a lush valley southeast of Nazareth and just south of Mount Tabor. Two large crowds are mentioned in the text—one with Jesus and one with this woman.

As Jesus entered the town, a funeral procession was leaving it. A woman’s *only* (the same word in John 3:16 for “only begotten”) son was *being carried out*. The mother most likely was leading the procession, for that was the custom in Jesus’ day. Luke implied much by adding, *and she was a widow*. This “silent one” (the meaning of *widow* in the Old Testament) had lost not only her husband but now her only begotten son as well. Her security, protection, and resources were gone. The large crowd accompanying her indicated many people were touched by her plight.

When Jesus saw her, *his heart went out to her* (felt compassion for her). Her pain was now in Jesus’ heart. He told her, “Stop crying” (i.e., the sense in Greek). He knew what he would do (just as when he raised Jairus’s daughter and Lazarus). He *touched the bier* (somewhat like a casket). This made Jesus unclean, but he immediately destroyed the evidence of uncleanness by raising the young man from the dead. People must have been shocked.

Jesus actually spoke to the dead man (cf. John 5:25), and the man *sat up*. The man also *began to talk*—he probably had lots to say. In a touching phrase, Luke said that Jesus *gave him back to his mother*. What a gift! God had become her husband (Isaiah 54:5), but God gave her boy back to her. No wonder everyone was *filled with awe and praised God*. With the people’s reservoir of Old Testament understanding, they thought a prophet had arisen (Elijah? cf. 1 Kings 17:17-24; or Elisha? cf. 2 Kings 4:8-37). The news (word, “logos”) about this spread like wildfire.

Compassion to the Distraught

Luke 7:18-23

Social media didn’t yet exist, but news of this resurrection spread quickly—even 90 miles to the south. John the Baptist was incarcerated in Machaerus (east of the Dead Sea). His disciples (i.e., John’s followers) told the imprisoned prophet about Jesus’ miracles.

John dispatched two of his followers to question Jesus. “*Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?*” In other words, “Are you the Messiah?” What could possibly generate such a question? Was John discouraged or depressed? Possibly—his counterpart in the Old Testament got that way (1 Kings 19:1-9). Prison can tear away at one’s tenacity. Was he ignorant? Did he just want to know what Jesus was doing? Possibly, for he had no TV in his cell. Or was he distraught? He had predicted a fiery Messiah who would take his winnowing fork and clean the threshing floor (Matthew 3:11-12). Instead, John was told this Messiah was healing everyone. John was hoping for Dwayne Johnson and instead got Fred Rogers.

John knew beyond a shadow of doubt that Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:32-34). But Jesus was bringing in the kingdom differently than John had perceived. When John’s disciples asked Jesus the question of his messiahship, Jesus offered up his miracles as proof he was the Messiah. Miracles were acts of war against Satan. Miracles were the fiery judgment on the devil to reclaim God’s world. It sounded like Isaiah 35:1-10 to the biblically informed. Jesus congratulated (blessed) anyone who would *not stumble* over his ministry. Jesus clearly was not mad at John—the following context attests to that (Luke 7:24-35). The Messiah just shows compassion differently than one might think. ■

APPLICATION

WHO CARES?

BY DAVID FAUST

Larry Monroe is president and CEO of Christian Village Communities, which owns and operates two Christ-centered continuing care retirement communities in the Cincinnati area. One day he exited his Mason, Ohio, office and was walking to a meeting, looking focused and intense. As he passed a resident who was being pushed in a wheelchair, he greeted her with a quick and casual hello. Larry recalls,

As I walked on by, I clearly heard her say to the person pushing her, “He really doesn’t care.” I was stopped in my tracks. I quickly caught up with the resident, knelt beside her wheelchair, took her hand, and asked her to forgive me. My casual greeting had demonstrated to her that I did not really see her in the way she needed me to see her.

Larry says, “I’ll forever be grateful for the lesson she taught me that day. She made me a better leader. I now make a greater effort to truly demonstrate that I care as I interact with people.”

The Great Differentiator

These days, care is rare. How often do you encounter genuine, unselfish concern for others?

Loveless environments result in lackluster experiences, and an “I don’t care” attitude is easy to detect. Have you ever eaten in a restaurant where the servers chat with each other while neglecting the diners? Or shopped in a store where the workers act annoyed if you ask for help? Or attended a party where others ignored you? Or tried to bear a burden too heavy to carry on your own? Or visited a church where no one made any effort to help you feel at home?

The scarcity of kindness creates a huge opportunity for Christians. Jesus said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). Love is the great differentiator.

The norm is, “everyone looks out for their own interests” (Philippians 2:21), so unselfish love will set you apart.

His Heart Went Out to Her

A brokenhearted woman led a funeral procession outside the village of Nain. She was a widow, already dealing with the sad memory of her husband’s death. Now it was time to bury another family member—her only son.

Jesus came near to the grieving widow—physically close enough to touch the stretcher where her son’s body lay and emotionally close enough to share her sorrow. “When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her” (Luke 7:13). After the dead man miraculously came back to life, Luke pointed out tenderly, “Jesus gave him back to his mother” (v. 15).

The hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy” reminds us that the Lord is both “merciful and mighty”—merciful enough to care about our sorrows and mighty enough to raise the dead. The raising of the dead man in Nain foreshadows the final resurrection when the Lord will once again reconnect loved ones separated by death.

The Lord specializes in renewing hope and restoring relationships. Meanwhile, he calls us to enter the physical and emotional space of the sad, the broken, the marginalized, and the overlooked. Will we pay attention and listen—really listen? Will we care for our neighbors, visit the sick, comfort the grieving, and pray for the weak? They will know we are Christians by our love.

Personal Challenge: How will you demonstrate the compassion of Christ this week? Suggestions: (1) Make a phone call or write an encouraging note to a widow or widower. (2) Visit someone who resides in a senior living facility. (3) Bake cookies and take them to a neighbor who lives alone. **L**

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How do you think we as a group did over the past week at serving and sharing with one another?
2. How did last week go in regard to sharing the gospel with people in your circles of influence?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 7:11-23** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in about a minute or less.

3. What impression of Jesus do you get from this passage?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - Looking at the entire passage, how does Jesus' compassion and care lead to his opportunity to cure?
 - How does his presence lead to a display of his power, which leads to an understanding of his purpose?
 - Compare the widow who lost her son with the imprisoned John the Baptist. How were their situations similar?
 - How were they different?
 - How does Jesus' list of wonders in verse 22 answer John the Baptist's question in verse 20?
5. What do you learn about God through Jesus from this passage?
6. What do you learn about yourself?
7. The apostle Peter said, "Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble" (1 Peter 3:8). What will you do to love others as Jesus did?
8. To whom will you share "what you have seen and heard" about Jesus and his love and power?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What "cure" are you hoping for?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Luke 7:36-50**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■