

Intro: In the midst of our troubles we are left with two primary questions regarding God: "Is He willing to help me?" and "Is He capable of helping me?" These are the two areas that our enemy tries to get us to doubt because they are so important for our joy and for our love and praise of God. And often, I think, that we vacillate between blaming God for not being willing to help to the depression of futility because we feel that God stands far off from either because He is somehow disinterested in our good or because He would really like to help but cannot help us until we act first. In these thoughts lie the poison pill of deceit, for God is not strapped by our unbelief from moving for our good, nor is He far off and removed like some watchmaker who just wound up the world and let 'er rip then left for work. No, God is deeply involved in the affairs of men, not merely mankind, but you. He has moved toward you by revealing Himself through history and through His Word, through prophets and kings and the history of his workings with Israel. Yet, He has fully revealed Himself in the person of His son, Jesus Christ, who is the fullest expression of His person and the exact representative of His glory. You see, God is so willing to help that He became one of us. He left His crown for a cross and the Son of God became poor that you and I might gain the wealth of the presence of God forever. He is willing. And He is capable. Nothing stands in the way of God, for when He moves heaven and earth part asunder and He even steers the hearts of man like channels of water before Him. There is nothing, not even your doubts, that can hold Him back from accomplishing His good and perfect will.

And not even death keeps God from revealing the greatness of His glory. Today we see the compassion of Christ Jesus poured out upon a woman who had suffered the greatest loss imaginable. In her grief, we see Jesus fix his attention on her suffering, be moved by her sorrow, and show His immense authority over even death itself. He is willing and He is capable. Let us see Jesus.

1. DEATH BECOMES US: A funeral procession is going out of town
  - a. We live in a society that doesn't grieve death well because it denies the significance of life and thus has nothing in which to truly hope
    - i. "You are a produce of causes that had no prevision of the end they were achieving. All your hopes, all your fears, all your loves, all your beliefs of your mind, are nothing but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms and molecules." (Bertrand Russell)
    - ii. "Therefore, there is no reason for attributing to a man a significance different in kind from that which belongs to a baboon or a grain of sand." (Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.)
    - iii. And, yet, at the same time we are desperate for significance, for meaning, thus there is a contradictory system of values that compete to pull us in a downward spiral of despair
      1. "As a politician he will cry out that war is a waste of life. But as a philosopher he must admit that all life is a waste of time. The man of this school goes first to a political meeting where he complains that native populations are treated as if they were beasts. Then, of course, he goes to a scientific meeting where he proves that they actually are beasts." (G.K. Chesterton)
  - b. We hate funerals
    - i. They remind us the brevity of our life, the futility of our efforts, the reality of our smallness
    - ii. They also remind us that things are not the way they are supposed to be, and they force us to ask the deeper and larger questions of meaning and significance, sin and salvation
  - c. A "considerable crown" in a funeral procession and "a great crowd" traveling with Jesus meet in the road...presumably the crowd with Jesus moves out of the way for the funeral
    - i. The two crowds meet on the road with Jesus in between them: a great scene of hope and despair running into each other with Jesus in the middle
    - ii. Jesus doesn't move out of the way
2. Jesus Has Compassion on the Weak
  - a. Jesus sees the one suffering
    - i. Among the throngs of people, Jesus sees one woman, the widow, the one bearing up the greatest sorrow and he fixes his gaze upon her
    - ii. Compassion focuses on another person, fully and completely
  - b. It was not the boy's death that he saw, but the mother's grief
    - i. "The Lord saw *her* and had compassion on *her* and said *to her*..."
    - ii. What does compassion look like?
      1. "What did people see on Jesus' features in this scene? After all, compassion is quite subtle compared to anger or fear. When I ask people what compassion looks like, they say it's communicated through a person's eyes: They are soft and tender, attentive, concerned. The entire body pauses and listens, absorbing the feelings of another." (Paul Miller, Love Walked Among Us)
  - c. What did she look like? What was her pain and her loss and her future hope?

- i. She had lost everything
    - 1. She had lost her husband (widow)
    - 2. She had lost a child
  - ii. It was her only son who died
    - 1. Not only did she have no husband to provide for her, but now her son was also dead
    - 2. "Nain" sounds like the Hebrew word for "pleasant" (naim) and is most likely the word for "pasture"
      - a. This woman reflects the same loss and sorrow as Naomi, who said, "Don't call me Naomi any longer (which means pleasant), but call me Mara (bitter), for the LORD has made my life very bitter."
    - 3. She had no protector, no prospects, no hope
      - a. This mention evokes the real plight of this widow, for the greatest joy for Jewish woman was the birth of a son, and the greatest loss was the death of a son
        - i. She lost her Social Security, Medicare, and retirement all at once
        - ii. It was also the case that in the ancient near east the death of a child was perceived to be a curse from God for personal sin
          - 1. Thus, people may have been wondering what she had done, gossiping and blaming
          - 2. She bore the shame of these deaths along with the grief
      - b. Loneliness, shame, abandonment, powerlessness, poverty
        - i. widows are linked with the poor in Scripture because of their lack of power in society and their inability to provide well for themselves
        - ii. The women would also lead funeral processions because it was believed that a woman's sin led to death in the world thus women should lead the procession out of the world
        - iii. Thus, there was shame involved upon this poor woman along with the immensity of her loss and grief
  - d. In this moment Jesus is fully fixed upon this woman, giving full attention to her in the midst of her sorrow
    - i. Jesus sees her, *feels* her suffering, and next he will *move toward her for her good*
      - 1. Compassion is different from pity in that compassion moves towards the other with action to alleviate suffering while pity just sees and feels the suffering of another
      - 2. We are never called to pity others, but we are called to show compassion (col 3:12)
3. Jesus is Powerful to Help
- a. Words of hope
    - i. "Stop weeping"
    - ii. seems silly to say
      - 1. unless you have a good reason
      - 2. how could things possibly be OK? What tears shed are wasted in grief?
  - b. Touched the funeral plank
    - i. This would have defiled him ceremonially
    - ii. Jesus takes on this man's curse and uncleanness
      - 1. He is so holy and so powerful and so full of life that he cannot be defiled, so he takes on this man's uncleanness of death and swallows it up with the power of his life
  - c. Jesus speaks life
    - i. He addresses the young man himself
    - ii. He speaks with His own authority: "I say to you"
      - 1. Luke calls Jesus, "the Lord" here for the first time in the gospel
      - 2. Luke is emphasizing the sovereign power and authority of Jesus of Nazareth
    - iii. His words restore life from death
      - 1. The living youth spoke words
    - iv. Jesus' actions back up his words
      - 1. He keeps his campaign promises and the rest of the gospel show the same: He is Lord and He is King and He redeems His people
      - 2. The understanding of Him and His work will grow, but it is not less than total authority
  - d. Jesus' life brings restoration
    - i. He restored the young man back to his mother
    - ii. This saved both the youth and the mother
    - iii. Note that Jesus' miracle did not distract Jesus from his attention to the mother
      - 1. His compassion is complete as he delivers the young man back to his mother
      - 2. He is constantly attended to her, not to his fame or even a sermon, but to this grieving woman

4. GLORY: Jesus has scary power that glorifies God
  - a. The crowd (and apostles?) were seized by fear
  - b. They glorified God
  - c. Their understanding was imperfect, but growing
    - i. They saw Jesus as a great prophet (like Elijah from 1 Kings 17)
      1. It had been 400 years since a prophet appeared in Israel, so there was great hope expressed in this exclamation
      2. Yet, Jesus didn't need to touch the boy or appeal to God, but spoke life
        - a. Elijah and Elisha both had to go through a great ordeal to raise a son to life
        - b. Cry out loudly to the LORD, stretched himself out on the boy three times (1 Kings 17)
        - c. Elisha had his staff laid on the child, prayed to the LORD, laid down eye to eye and mouth to mouth and arm to arm, got up and paced, stretched out on him again, the child sneezed 7 times (2 Kings 4)
      3. This is a creative act, not merely as a conduit of power, but God speaking existence (like Creation in Genesis 1) - "Get up!"
    - ii. They also recognized that God was going to do an amazing work of salvation ("visited" brings back images of rescue from Egypt, see Ex 13:19; Luke 1:68,78)
    - iii. Clearly, they see Jesus as sent from God for them...to bring life.

#### Conclusion: The Gate

Do you know hope? Upon what do you place your trust for hope today? These two groups of people: mourners in despair and followers of Jesus met outside the gateway to the city. They had left the security and protection of the walls because death forced them to move outside the city in despair. This is where Jesus met this desperate woman and gave her hope.

Which crowd are you in today? It may be, and it's not wrong, that you are grieving a loss, feeling the weight of the consequences of what sin has done to this world. Are you worried, anxious, depressed? What have you lost that you feel you simply cannot go on without? Trudging eastward toward the valley of death you feel the darkness overwhelm you.

Remember Jesus. Jesus fixed his eyes upon you and upon your sorrow. And He doesn't stand far off and away in mere pity, but with compassion. He moved in close. So close as to walk the valley of the shadow of death alone before His Father for you. He paid down death's debt so that you would no longer need fear his arrows. He took on our uncleanness and gave to us His life. He restores the broken-hearted with the glories of His great love, and He restores the broken relationships, even the one that seem to be separated by a river as large as death itself. Death cannot assault you, suffering cannot rob you, for your Master has defanged the great serpent and dried up the Styx. Jesus moved in to rescue from the consequences of your sin before God so that for those who put their trust in Christ Jesus there is no more condemnation, but only joy in the presence of God forever. In Jesus, death has no danger and life is abundant.

It is Jesus who gives hope today. He not only moved, but is on the move. He sees your suffering and your sorrow this morning. He leans in and stands in the road, reaching into your pain to bring you from death from life. He is the gateway between despair and hope, death to life, exclusion to inclusion, sorrow to dancing, despair to hope. He is the One who brings those whom he rescues into the security and protection and joy of the kingdom of God.

And He moves with compassion and with power. Your life is not too far gone. Your pain is not so great that He cannot bring hope. Jesus is willing to help and powerful enough to bring life. Trust in Him and listen to His voice.