

The Compassion Of Jesus

Today, we'll again be following along with the Lord Jesus as He travels about the countryside of Galilee, preaching and teaching and healing the people that He encounters along His way. And we can't help but marvel at the loving compassion that flows out from His heart towards those who are hurting and suffering.

And we are reminded by these words, that that same loving and compassionate grace of God is also being poured out upon each one of us as we go throughout our days, helping us, blessing us, comforting us, protecting us, and providing for us, giving us everything that we need for our daily lives.

And as we have been saying over these past few weeks, we need always to remember that God's compassionate loving care does not come to us just by His keeping a close watch over us and responding to our daily needs. It would seem that He does it that way, and many people believe that to be so.

But we need to always keep in mind that God truly is Omniscient. And none of the matters that we encounter each day are random and catch Him unaware. Our God is bigger than that. Everything that takes place really is part of a plan that God is working out.

And yes, that sounds unlikely to us, even impossible, considering how we exercise our own free will to do most all the things that take place each day. But we need to keep in mind that mysterious concept that we have talked about often from this pulpit, the understanding that while yes, we are always busily working out the matters of our daily lives, there is also a "concurrent" activity always taking place between God's guiding Hand and our personal human behaviors.

Our Westminster Theologians of the past described that concept as God being the "first cause" of all that takes place, and then our free will involvement being "secondary causes", God initiating the things that take place and then our working within His "first causes".

It sounds complicated, and I don't personally comprehend it well. But I do believe it, otherwise all the events taking place within our world each day would

be random and “willy-nilly” with God having to run along behind us straightening out our continual messes.

I offer these thoughts because within the first few words of our scripture passage for today, it would seem that the circumstance that Jesus encountered involving a funeral procession of a young man who had just died was one of happenstance, a random and even unexpected occurrence.

But may I say again that, with God, such encounters are never random and unexpected, that God intentionally brings about circumstances and opportunities in order to display His glory and His power. And here, in this passage, He is showing the compassion that flows through His heart at every moment of every day.

Listen carefully as I read these words in Luke chapter 7, beginning in verse 11.

11 Soon afterward (this is after Jesus had healed the centurion's servant) he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. 12 As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. 13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” 14 Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” 15 And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. 16 Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!” 17 And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. (Luke 7:11-17)

May I say again that the grace of God is poured out upon us every moment of every day, blessing us, protecting us, providing for us, and giving us everything that we need for life and godliness.

And folks, His kindness is not just extended to those of us who have given our lives to Him in salvation, but as the words we just studied in chapter 6 tells us, “God is also kind to the ungrateful and even to the people who are evil”.

But folks, especially for those of us who have given our hearts to Christ in salvation, God is gracious and kind beyond measure. He not only meets the

needs within the ordinary matters of daily life, He especially reaches in and meets the needs of our souls.

Listen to those words in 2 Peter chapter 1,

³His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. (2 Peter 1:3)

These are precious words folks. And the pouring out of God's mercy and grace does not ever cease. His mercy and grace are an ever-flowing stream of sweet provision, covering over and saturating every crevice of our being.

That is part of the significance of these words of this passage. Recall that in the words just preceding these, Jesus had blessed and rewarded the centurion for his great faith and humility by healing the man's beloved servant. Now here in this passage, on the very next day, Jesus again poured out compassionate mercy and grace upon another suffering soul, a grieving mother.

And how assuring it is to us to know that God does not take a day off in His loving ministry of mercy and grace! None of us would be able to survive even for one moment without His loving provision.

Unfortunately, though for the most of us, and perhaps even for many of the most devout of believing Christians, we have gotten so accustomed to God's gracious flow of mercy and grace that we think very little about it. We simply receive it without thought or "thank you" and we go on about our busy days.

It is often only when we are brought back to real reality by painful suffering or grief that our hearts and minds stop to remember the One "from whence our help comes", the loving Provider of all good things, the Lord Jesus.

And God's mercy and grace is not only continual, it is also full and complete. He takes everything into consideration. Here, a young man had died and his body was being carried in his coffin to the cemetery. And in the procession were grieving friends and relatives, especially the young man's mother.

The mother's grief was certainly for her son, but beneath the surface of her grief for him was also, no doubt, another form of grief, grief for herself. She had not

only lost a beloved son, she is said here to also be a widow, which means that she would also be fearful about her future provision and support in her old age.

There is no indication that Jesus knew these people personally, but that did not matter. As we know from other passages in these scriptures, Jesus was able to perceive the thoughts within their minds, and He knew that the death of this woman's son held all sorts of grief and fears for her. And that stirred up compassion within Him.

Folks, this is an especially important truth for you and me to know and to be confident in. God is especially concerned for and compassionate towards widows and orphans. He loves and He watches over them, always reaching out ahead of them to meet their needs.

And that is exactly what Jesus did for this grieving widow. With great pity and compassion, He reached out His hand and met her deepest needs.

But let me return for a moment to our thoughts on the unceasing flow of mercy and grace that God pours out upon all of us each day. Unseen and hidden within the daily occurrences of what our "scientists" call "nature", are interlaced the moment by moment acts of loving mercy and grace flowing out from the heart of God.

And it is far more obvious and simple than we imagine. It is the very air we breathe, the cycle of life that takes place to provide us food to eat and water to drink, and even the sweet comfort and compassion shown by friends and relatives during such times as this of this mother's grief.

Those are not "acts of nature" folks. Nature does not have a heart or a mind to care about us. The "naturalists" who assign a life force to nature are wrong, misguided and pitiable in their foolish "wisdom of the wise".

All those loving provisions are, in truth, sweet gifts of love and mercy and grace being poured out of the heart of God, out onto the ones who most need it, in this case a grieving mother.

And yes, God does often use other vessels to carry forth His great mercy and grace, vessels such as nature and people. But we must always remember, that love and mercy and grace can never originate within nature, nor from within

the hearts of men. Those things are never natural to us. We are by nature self-centered, self-seeking, self-providing, and so much so that we have very little time for another person's grief or suffering.

It is only as the Spirit of God flows His mercy and grace through the hearts of people that we become agents of love and care. And no, such things do not only take place within believing Christians. God can and does very often use unbelievers, even the most wretched of sinners. Simply put, God can use any vessel He chooses to carry forward His love and His compassion, His plan and His will.

You can easily see that taking place within the many blessings and provisions available to you and to me in all the many venues of daily life. Our wonderful healthcare system is often being provided by people who do not acknowledge the Lordship of Christ.

And the same is so for our banking system, our legal system and especially in our governmental system, men and women who often demonstrate very ungodly behavior, but nonetheless bringing very beneficial blessings to each of us.

But again, you and I must always know, without hesitation, that the "first cause", the first heart, the first hand within all the mercy and grace being poured out upon us comes ever and always from the loving and compassionate heart of God. Isn't God simply wonderful!

And with sweet understanding of our inability to easily recognize His personal hand in all these things, here in this passage, the Lord Jesus very graciously lets us watch as His mercy and grace flows directly from His own hand . . . not through the hand of a third party, a doctor or some other healthcare provider, but through the personal touch and healing hand of our blessed Savior, the Lord Jesus, the greatest of all physicians.

Again, what a precious and wonderful God we have! Here, Jesus is shown to us as walking among common ordinary people just like you and me, seeing their suffering, their grief and their needs and reaching out His hand to meet and to satisfy those needs.

And folks . . . you and I must somehow be able to grasp the greater truth that is being shown to us here . . . that Jesus is actually doing that very same thing with you and me, even right at this moment, and at every moment.

Jesus truly is "Immanuel", "God with us". Those people were proclaiming that truth here when they said, "God has visited His people." But the greater truth is, "God is still with us today".

Yes, He did come among them then. And yes, He died on that cross and then ascended into heaven. But the mysteries of God reach on beyond our common understanding of such things. He was then, but He also still is now, "Immanuel", "God with us", right within our midst, right at this moment.

May I say this again . . . Jesus is with you and me today, just as much as He was with those people then. The Spirit of Christ is living and active and walking among us, on our streets and in our homes, observing our suffering and our grief, and reaching out His hand and touching us, and touching our sons and our daughters. And He is healing our diseases and blessing and protecting us at every moment.

Just because we can't see His face or feel His hand touching us, does not in any way deny His presence. He truly is here, now, ministering His mercy and His grace every moment. Does that not make you want to raise your hands in praise to the Lord!

And His provision covers every possible need. This dear mother was grieving the loss of her only and beloved son. Her grief probably seemed unbearable to her at the moment. And Jesus knew that, and with great love and compassion, He gave the dear woman's son back to her. What a precious gift!

But again, God's mercy and grace is not limited just to the moment. It reaches forward into all the future needs. Through His bringing this young man back to life, Jesus not only satisfied this dear mother's immediate grief and suffering, His gift reached on into the future and made provision for her many years of needs as an aging widow. Her son would be with her to help her through those years.

And again, this gift of mercy and grace is boundless. It reached on out past the needs of this dear woman and her son. It reached on out into the lives of the people in the crowds that were watching them.

Did you note here that as Jesus raised the young man from death, it brought about great fear in the hearts of the on-lookers? That too is an act of great compassion.

Because fear is a powerful messenger to an unbelieving soul. We are told in the Book of Proverbs that “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”, that “fear of the Lord brings knowledge”, that “fear of the Lord prolongs our days” and on and on. “Fear of the Lord” allows great and wonderful changes to be wrought within the souls of men and women, changes that would not otherwise take place.

Those people watched as Jesus reached out His hand and simply touched the coffin and then miraculously spoke life back into the body of that dead young man.

No doubt, some of those people would have remembered the scripture verses they had been taught in their synagogues about the prophet Ezekiel, when God enabled Ezekiel to speak life back into dry and dead bones. Perhaps that is why they marveled and said that a prophet had been raised up among them.

But folks, it is not prophets or preachers that do such things. Prophets and preachers are simply messengers of the Most High God, emissaries, sent to do His bidding.

Jesus was a prophet yes, but He was Himself also the Most High God. And He could do far more than simply speak life back into the body of a dead person.

As we know from these scriptures, Jesus was the One in the Trinity who had spoken all things into existence. And yes, it was Jesus who had breathed life into the first young man on the earth, Adam.

And if Jesus could breathe life into the first man on the earth, and if He could speak life into all living creatures, then speaking life back into the body of this young man would have been an easy thing for Him to do.

But again, the benefits did not stop at simply raising the young man back to life. Jesus' miraculous deed struck fear into the hearts of the people and gave them one more reason to know and to believe that God truly was among them and

that He wanted to reach into their souls and to bring “eternal life” to them. And here, we are told that they glorified God!

Let me close for today with those same words to you and me. Folks, Jesus wants to reach out and to touch you and me and to bring real life into our souls. All we have to do is be receptive to His touch, and to freely invite Him to bring His life into our souls. And He will do that for us!

Let's you and I do that as we pray.