

SCRIPTURE INTRO: This passage is a miracle story, one of Jesus’ greatest. His miracles were not just displays of power, they were supernatural revelations of who he was and what came to do.

So what about this miracle? What does it reveal and demonstrate?

You might think it’s to show his power over death, something like that.

But it’s not, at least not primarily.

In this miracle is a revelation of the heart of Jesus Christ.

INTRO: About 15 years ago I read a book that was very helpful to me spiritually.

And I thought that one day I'd like to try to use it for a sermon series.

The book is called *Love Walked Among Us*

and the subtitle is *Learning to Love Like Jesus*.

It was written by Paul Miller, who also wrote the book *A Praying Life*

that we read in Covenant Groups a few years ago.

Let me read you a few paragraphs from the introduction

and you'll understand what the book is about and where we are going

in this sermon series.

In 1991 my wife, Jill, asked me, "Do you love me?" We had been going through a hard time, but hard times weren't unknown to us. We have six children whose ages at the time were 2, 5, 8, 12, 14, and 16. Our eight-year-old, Kim, is disabled—unable to speak, unable to do many things other children do. Sometimes Jill got so tired that she'd fall asleep during dinner.

It had been a long day, and I thought she just wanted me to reassure her that I loved her. "Of course I love you," I said. But then she asked me again, "Paul, do you love me?" The third time she asked, I got irritated with her. Of course I loved her. Didn't I help out with the kids? In the morning I dressed the little guys and got them breakfast. In the evening I read to them and put them all to bed. I helped constantly. Case closed. That night I went to sleep fuming at Jill, still making a list of all the ways I loved her.

I didn't tell Jill, but her question gnawed at me. What does it mean to love someone? What does love look like?

As I thought about love, I began to think about Jesus. After all, Jesus is supposed to be the most merciful and self-giving person who ever lived. I decided to study his life to see how he related to others. What was he like? How did he treat people? And slowly by slowly, as they say in Africa, I began to understand what it really means to love."

What Paul Miller does, and what we'll do, is look at a wide variety of stories in the Gospels where Jesus interacts with people, and look for patterns that emerge that give us insight into how Jesus loved.

The more stories we read, the more layers we'll add to our understanding.

You will start to see some of the things Jesus does over and over—
and then surprising things that you have to fit in.

After we see how Jesus loved people,

then we'll think about how this applies to us

and our interactions with the people God has put in our lives.

I hope the Holy Spirit will use this study to make me a more loving person.

And that's my prayer for you too, for all of us.

So let's look Luke 7.

It's a good place to start because it shows us the essence of love in the person of Jesus Christ. Love is having a mind full of someone else.

Five points, I'll give them to you as we go.

MP#1 Love Sees The Other Person

When I was in seminary, Allison supported us by teaching at a high school in north St. Louis, right next to Ferguson, Mo.

She had a student, a girl named Ramelle, whose older brother passed away.

The service was at a funeral home downtown called Foster's Funeral Home. We sat near the back of the chapel. There were about 200 people present.

Besides us, there was only one other white person there.

The pastor had a good message.

When he finished we expected the service to end as we had always seen it done. We thought the pallbearers would wheel out the casket, the family would follow quietly with tears in their eyes, we would all stand there silently as they went out. Instead, ushers came to the back and motioned for our row to stand.

We had to go up front, pass by the open casket one more time, pay our final respects and then return to our seats.

But what happened was, as people went forward row by row, those sitting closer became more and more expressive in their grief.

And the members of the congregation started responding to their pain.

And the organ started playing louder and louder.

When it was time for the front rows to go to the casket, the immediate family of the man who had died, they started screaming and wailing and falling down.

Suddenly someone shouted—Ramelle's not breathing! Breathe, Ramelle!

Everybody in the place stood up and surged forward.

Allison grabbed my arm in alarm. She thought Ramelle would be crushed.

And at that moment pastor said very loudly: Sit down! You aren't dismissed.

Now, I tell that story just to say that this funeral in Luke 7

was a lot more like Foster's Funeral Home in St. Louis

than the typical reserved service at Moss Funeral Home in Cullman, Alabama.

There was a lot going on at this funeral in Nain.

Burials took place before sundown on the day person died, so emotions still raw.

There was a funeral procession to the cemetery, a large crowd from the town.

We don't know the population of Nain. Some have speculated at least 500.

Expressions of grief were very pronounced.

The mother of the dead man would have torn her clothes and would be wailing.

There were other women called wailing women.

They were paid to come to funeral and their job was to wail.

There were musical instruments playing tunes that were associated with funerals. The deceased was carried in an open wicker basket, so his body could be seen. All of these things stirred up the emotions.

So as this funeral procession was going out of Nain, and even bigger crowd was coming in—Jesus, his disciples, and the multitude. Once again, we don't know the number, could have been as many as 1,000 people. These two groups collided on the road, and the bigger group probably parted to let the funeral procession through, so there would have been a lot of confusion. People jumping off the road into the ditches, and so forth. Women wailing, horns and flutes blowing. The dead man in the casket being carried up high, probably being jostled. Lots going on, lots to look at, lots of distractions.

What did Jesus do? What's the very first thing Luke tells us: The Lord saw her. His eyes were drawn to the one person in the greatest pain. As we study how Jesus loved, this is going to be a repetitive theme. Jesus looked at people. He concentrated on them. He saw them.

The Gospel writers tell us this again and again and again. It struck them as immensely important. Most of us don't see people as we should. I know I don't. Love begins by looking. We'll learn more in coming weeks.

MP#2 Love feels compassion

“When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her . . .”

He was moved with compassion.

Luke was not an eyewitness of this event.

He wrote his Gospel about 30 years after Jesus’ ascension.

Luke interviewed eyewitnesses decades later to get the information he needed.

That means he spoke to people who were there in Nain that day.

So here’s an intriguing question:

How did those who were there know Jesus felt compassion for the widow?

What did they see in Jesus’ face or in his demeanor?

Compassion is a subtle emotion.

We could all describe what anger looks like in a person’s face, fear. Not subtle.

But how do you describe what compassion looks like as an emotional response?

It’s mostly communicated through the eyes, isn’t it?

They become soft and tender and attentive. They communicate concern.

The entire body pauses and listens and absorbs the feelings of the other person.

Other people and distractions are shut out.

Whatever his reaction, it was noticeable in all the commotion of those two colliding crowds. Maybe disciples asked questions, he ignored them.

It was a genuine, visceral response toward this woman in her pain.

It’s not unusual to recognize that another person is suffering.

It’s not unusual to wish weren’t hurting, wish better things for that person.

But it’s a very unusual and great thing to actually feel the weight they are carrying on your shoulders, or to struggle to fall asleep at night because you feel their pain, or to shed genuine tears for them.

That’s the inward motion of compassion.

The outward motion is toward the person to be with her or him in the pain.

There was nothing theoretical about the Lord’s compassion.

He felt her desolation and his heart went out to her even though she was a total stranger, even though she didn’t ask him for help or tell him her story.

He picked up the details in a heartbeat. That’s how attentive he was.

She was a widow already, now she had lost her only son.

So compounding the grief of loss was the financial and material uncertainty

that she faced. Sons were the health insurance and retirement of aging parents.

Now hers was gone.

Jesus also felt compassion because he had experienced the death of a loved one.

He knew sorrow firsthand.

But by the time Jesus began his ministry at age 30, Mary was a widow.

So Jesus had been part of Joseph's funeral procession.

He had watched his own mother mourn the death of husband.

This is one of the mysteries and glories of our faith.

Through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, our God feels human sorrow.

The Lord was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

So when he encountered suffering people, he was moved with compassion.

Sympathy and love flowed out of him in to such a degree that people noticed.

When you are hurting, you can be assured that he cares for you.

When you see other people hurting, Jesus has compassion on them.

As the glorified man in heaven, his heart is still moved.

Maybe as we study Jesus his spirit of compassion will grow in us.

MP#3 Love brings hope

When you love someone, you introduce hope into his or her world.

Jesus tells her: Don't cry. Everything will be ok.

What do you think about Jesus telling her that?

I mean, it's Jesus, so how can you say he's wrong?

But you have to admit that in our society it's considered wrong to tell someone not to feel a certain way.

It's especially frowned upon to interrupt the grieving process.

And there's wisdom in that.

Perhaps you've encountered someone doing this.

Telling someone who is grieving that they need to move on, that sort of thing.

Jesus interrupted her grieving.

He sounds like a mother cradling a child who has skinned his knee.

Don't cry, the mother says, It's going to be ok.

Because she knows it will be ok. This is not the end of the world.

Only this is not a skinned knee, it's the death of a widow's only son.

There are a number of lessons we need to learn from this.

The first is that it's easy to turn something like the grieving process into a modern legalism.

Never interrupt the grieving process.

Never tell someone not to feel a certain way.

Jesus did. And that shows us that there are times true, Christ-like love

is going to challenge cultural norms that tell us what love must do or not do.

Why might you lovingly interrupt the grieving process?

Well, for one thing, grief can become enslaving, it can become a person's identity.

We can also wallow in empathy to the point paralyzed and don't say anything.

Think about it, any expression of hope is going to push back against grief, however subtly.

But here's the other lesson, bringing hope takes sensitivity.

In John 11 at the grave of Lazarus when Jesus saw Mary weeping, what did he do?

Jesus wept. Even though he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead.

In dealing with Mary, his close friend, he didn't tell her not to cry. He cried too.

And adding to the complexity, do you remember what he said to Lazarus' other sister, Martha?

He didn't cry with her or tell her not to cry,

he engaged her in a discussion about the hope of the resurrection and basically encouraged her to get our her faith and put it to work. Jesus treated each grieving person differently— but his purpose was the same—to give them hope— hope in him and his power to make things ok.

You love people by giving them the hope of Christ. We'll never match Jesus' sensitivity and wisdom, his perfect touch for each person. But we can ask the Holy Spirit to help us. And perhaps, as we look more closely at Jesus, we'll grow in our ability to effectively give hope.

MP#4 Love helps

I'm focusing here on the miracle itself.

It's easy to think this doesn't apply to us.

We can't do miracles.

We can't go to someone who has lost a child and raise the child from the dead.

Yes, but look at the details leading up to the miracle.

“Jesus went up and touched the coffin and those carrying it stood still.”

The funeral procession had the right of way.

The big crowd coming into the town would have parted to let through,

Like the way funeral processions have right of way when driving.

They go right though the stoplight.

But Jesus was not too shy or too concerned with formalities to stop the procession.

He wasn't worried about what people might think of him.

He wasn't thinking about himself, but how he could help this woman.

It goes even deeper. He touched the casket.

This would have been an open wicker basket, or even just a board.

The point is that he purposefully came in contact with a dead body.

That wasn't wrong to do, in the sense it was immoral—

but in the law of Moses, it did make you ceremonially unclean.

That meant you couldn't do certain things for a week, had to cut off contact,

couldn't attend worship, and so forth.

It was a pain, it was a severe inconvenience, it was costly.

You never would have intentionally touched a dead body,

that would have raised eyebrows.

But Jesus did.

I'm sure you see the application of these details to your life,

even if we don't have time to work our specifics.

Love helps. It's not paralyzed by shyness or formality.

Love helps. It's willing to do things that are inconvenient and costly,

and even things that make you unclean, in a sense—

things that might cause other people to raise eyebrows at your decision.

And that's because love is having mind full of someone else.

We'll see more of Jesus helping love in coming weeks.

MP#5 Love remembers the person

When Jesus raised the young man, it caused quite a stir, as you can imagine. People were filled with awe and they praised God and said that a great prophet has appeared among us and God has come to help his people.

There was a lot behind those comments.

The town on Nain was very close to a town called Shunem.

It was there the prophet Elisha raised a dead boy and gave back to mother. In addition, Elijah raised dead son of widow of Zarephath.

So these Jewish people immediately saw the connection.

Here's a man who has come in the spirit of Elijah and Elisha.

He's doing the same miracle. God has come to help us. Full of awe.

What an incredible opportunity for ministry.

The hearts of this crowd are open for the Gospel.

You would think that Jesus would see that and capitalize on it.

This is certainly the time for a great sermon about his power over death.

But did you notice the little detail?

What did Jesus do after raising the dead son?

He gave him back to his mother.

And this is one more affirmation of Christ's true compassion.

It shows he was still thinking about her.

He continued to make her his focus. He remembered her.

He didn't help her with her problem but leave her out of it.

He didn't help her as a project or a stepping-stone in his ministry.

Love remembers people.

You know the name Charles Spurgeon—the great 19th century English preacher.

His wife Suzie tells about a time she went with him

to a large auditorium where he was to speak.

We went together in a cab, and I well remember trying to keep close by his side as we mingled with the mass of people thronging up the staircase. But by the time we had reached the landing, he had forgotten my existence; the burden of the message was upon him, and he turned into the small side door where the officials were awaiting him, without for a moment realizing that I was left to struggle as best I could with the rough throng around me.

A large crowd, a frightened woman, a religious teacher.

But here the teacher forgets the woman because thinking about sermon.

Jesus forgoes a sermon for the sake of a person.

At first I was utterly bewildered, and then I was angry. I at once returned home and told my grief to my gentle mother. She wisely reasoned that my husband was no ordinary man, that his whole life was dedicated to God and that I must never, never hinder him.

Then Spurgeon got home, upset he couldn't find his wife.

My dear mother went to him and told him all the truth. Quietly he let me tell him how indignant I had felt, and then he repeated mother's little lesson pointing out that before all things, he was God's servant.

Paul Miller says:

“Did you notice how God got dragged in?

Somehow God was the reason Spurgeon ignored his wife.

So his wife gets lectured by both her mother and her husband for feeling hurt.

God isn't revealed in Spurgeon's life through this incident, he's the excuse for not loving.”

That's convicting, isn't it?

How often our helping is just a project to accomplish our personal ends—
or about making ourselves feel good by doing something.

And the evidence is that we move on to what really matters.

Love remembers the person and the Lord Jesus did that perfectly.

How do you conclude this sermon?

Therefore, you must:

see people, feel compassion, bring hope, help people and remember them.

No, that's not my final exhortation.

It's that there was only one man who ever did those things perfectly—
the man Christ Jesus.

So let's focus on him and trust him to lead us.