

Luke 7:11-17

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Soon afterward 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.

There's an old slogan which you're all familiar with that goes like this: "What Would Jesus Do?" Maybe you've seen the bracelets before, "WWJD?" "What Would Jesus Do?" And the thought behind those bracelets and that slogan is that when confronted with different situations, Christians will stop and think of what the God-pleasing solution might be: "What Would Jesus Do?"

And if you have one of those bracelets lying around, I'm not going to tell you to throw it in the trash, but there are maybe a few different problems with that slogan. One *big* issue, as I see it, is that if you read through the Gospels, Jesus is always doing something totally unexpected! How are we supposed to accurately answer, "What Would Jesus Do?" if the accounts of His life always show Him doing the last thing you would expect?

Take for instance, when word came to Jesus that His friend Lazarus was sick. ***"The sisters [Mary and Martha] sent to him, saying, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.'"*** (John 11:3) "What Would Jesus Do?" I reckon Jesus would jump on the first donkey out of town and go and take care of that family which He loved so much! And yet, that's not what Jesus does, is it? He does something totally unexpected! He doesn't move a muscle for two more days until Lazarus is dead. And that's not what I would have expected Jesus to do!

Or think of that time when the Canaanite mother (cf. Matthew 15:22-28) came to Jesus pleading with Him, ***"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon."*** Of course, Jesus would hear that a little girl was so afflicted and see this mother in distress, and *immediately* He would answer her cries and go and make that little girl well, wouldn't He? Except He doesn't. Instead, as the woman pleads for mercy, Jesus doesn't even acknowledge her at all! And that's not what I would have expected Jesus to do!

So, you see, "What Would Jesus Do?" isn't really the right question. Instead, today we're going to be considering two other questions: 1. **What Does Jesus Do?** 2. **What Will Jesus Do?**

Here in our text, we have two crowds coming together. One is Jesus and His disciples and the crowd of people that was following Him at this, the height of His popularity. And the other crowd is carrying with it a different mood entirely. It's the funeral procession for the only son of a widow. Truly a sad situation. With her son dying, not only does this woman lose her only remaining family, she also is losing her way of life and only means of making a living. So, a large crowd gathers to mourn together with her, and as the one crowd approaches the city gates, the funeral procession is passing through.

So, “What Would Jesus Do?” I know what I would do! We’ve all been there before. You’re driving down the road, and then you see that black hearse with lights flashing, a police escort, and dozens of cars lined up slowly following behind with their hazard lights blinking. When you see that, you know that this is the family and friends of someone who has died, all making their way to the cemetery to pay their final respects. And of course, since we know proper etiquette, we give way. We pull to the side of the road, we sit and wait through a green light, doing our small part to pay our respects.

And I imagine that as these two crowds converged, the disciples and the rest of Jesus’ crowd did the same. They likely stepped aside, and bowed their heads, and quietly paid respect to this dead son and this grieving widow. But that’s not what *Jesus* does! Jesus doesn’t yield an inch! Instead, He makes the funeral procession yield. He stops it in its tracks! That’s not what I would have expected Jesus to do, which again is why we’re not asking, “What Would Jesus Do?” but rather, **“What Does Jesus Do?”**

What does He do? We don’t have to guess, because Luke tells us. **“When the Lord saw her, he had compassion...”** But His compassion for the woman is a bit hard to see at first. He only has a couple words for her, **“Do not weep.”** Again, not what I’d expect Jesus to do; try telling a grieving widow at a funeral to stop crying and see how that would work out. That doesn’t seem very compassionate. But you see, for Jesus, compassion is not just empty words like we might say to someone at a funeral. For Jesus, compassion is not just a *feeling*. For Jesus, compassion is not just being there.

For Jesus, compassion is action. Because then, He turns to the casket and speaks to the boy, **“Young man, I say to you, arise.”** And like a good boy, he does what he’s told. So, **“What Does Jesus Do?”** He returns this boy to where he belongs, together with his mother. He robs the grave of another victim. He takes away the sole purpose of this funeral procession; death had brought this crowd together, and now death was in the rearview mirror. What would they do now? Well, they’re no longer continuing that slow march to the grave, that’s for sure! Instead, I imagine many of them joined with that other crowd in following Jesus, as they rejoiced that **“God [had] visited His people!”**

That’s what Jesus did then. **“What Does Jesus Do”** today? It’s the same thing, isn’t it? Because we witnessed a funeral procession here this morning. It might not have looked like it, but that’s what it was. Coming up the steps, walking through the front door—old, young, men, women, children—we were all of us that funeral procession. Because what we carried with us as we entered the building this morning was our sin, and *sin* is nothing less than *death in hiding*.

So, what deadness did you bring with you today? Was it the stench of doubt, or worry, or fear? Did you bring in the rotting mass of lust—of fleshly desire that grabs you and sometimes takes over so completely that it shocks you? What dead thing did you bring with you today? Perhaps it was the stiff corpse of pride that blinds you to the needs or desires or concerns of anyone else? Or maybe the dead thing you brought with you this morning is the corruption of guilt—horrendous past choices that still plague you today. Whatever it is, you were there in the funeral procession.

But this is where that procession ends. Because Jesus has had compassion on *you*. He halts our procession, stops us here in our tracks, and here Jesus puts His compassion into action. He finds those dead things that condemn you—that have put you into this mournful crowd—and He takes them away *from* you! The sin, the doubt, the guilt, the grief, the fear—He takes them from you for Himself.

He stops death in its tracks, and He defeats it. So, you may have come in here as part of a funeral procession, but you do not need to continue in it! Instead, join the other crowd! March in that company and meet your Savior up here at this altar. Rejoice and be amazed at the fact that God has visited you and returned you to where you *most* want to be—together with your Savior. That’s what Jesus has done. He did it for that young man, He’s done it for you. But **“What Will Jesus Do?”**

You know, there’s three funerals that Jesus attends that are recorded for us in the Gospels. There’s this one, the funeral for the son of the widow at Nain. There’s the funeral I mentioned earlier, that of Lazarus. Four days after Lazarus had died, the mourners were still present when Jesus finally arrived. And then there’s the funeral of Jairus’ daughter. (cf. Mark 5) He was a ruler of the synagogue who had come to Jesus because his daughter was on death’s doorstep. And when they arrived at the house, the commotion of wailing and mourning hit their ears, because the daughter had died before Jesus could arrive. Three funerals that Jesus attended.

And do you know what they all have in common? All three were funerals that *ended* because the dead did not stay dead, they were raised! Jesus said to this boy, **“Young man, I say to you, arise.”** To Lazarus, Jesus said, **“Lazarus, come out!”** (John 11:43) And to Jairus’ daughter, the Savior said, **“Talitha cumi,” which means, “Little girl, I say to you, arise.”** (Mark 5:41) And one-by-one, each did what they were told. The dead rose up out of the casket, walked out of the grave, and stood up from the bed—the dead no longer dead, but living.

Except—I said that Jesus attended *three* funerals—but there *was* a fourth. There was *another* funeral at which Jesus was present. And this one was the lone exception where Jesus did *not* stop death in its tracks. This was one where Jesus did *not* halt the processional, but instead *led* the processional, as He marched the cross up the hill outside the city gate and met death face to face. This time, death came for another *only-Son*, and this time death won. And then *three* days went by, three *long* days during which the grave held its victim. And then the grave was robbed, and death was undone, and the One who had died became the One who will live forevermore.

And we don’t have to guess at what this means. Jesus promises, **“Because I live, you also will live.”** (John 14:19) Death once-and-for-all met its match at the cross of calvary and in the empty tomb. And so, death will not have the final say in your life either! The rule goes like this: if Jesus attends a funeral, the dead do not stay dead. Three funerals, three resurrections. And Jesus will attend your funeral too. And **“What Will Jesus Do?”** He’ll do for you nothing less than He’s already promised: **“We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. . . ‘O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (1 Corinthians 15:51-52, 55-57)

So, you could go through life asking yourself the question, “What Would Jesus Do?” And it’s certainly not a bad thing to strive to make decisions that are God-pleasing. But “What Would Jesus Do?” involves a lot of guesswork. And based on what we know about Jesus, we’d likely be wrong a lot of the time. Better questions to ask would **“What Does Jesus Do?”** and **“What Will Jesus Do?”** And

thanks be to God, finding the answers to these questions involves *no* guesswork. For Jesus has already given you those answers.

- **“What Does Jesus Do?”** He ***“forgives all your iniquity, [He] heals all your diseases, [He] redeems your life from the pit, [and He] crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.”*** (Psalm 103:3-4)
- **“What Will Jesus Do?”** ***“[He] will come again and will take you to [Him]self, that where [He is] you may be also.”*** (John 14:3)

Yes, when Jesus attends a funeral, the dead do not stay dead. Thanks be to God that has He attended our funeral here today, and that He *will* attend our funeral again. We live, because of Jesus. Amen.

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7) Amen.