**HOPE WHEN THERE IS NO HOPE**

**Luke 7:11-17 Key Verse 7:13**

***“When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, “Don’t cry.”***

In today’s passage we see a tragic story. But in reality it’s the most beautiful story. A widow whose only son died was coming out of the town of Nain in a funeral procession going to the cemetery to bury her only son. Jesus was coming into the town with a large procession of people, including His disciples following Him. One was a procession of death, the other a procession of happiness and joy at what Jesus had done for the Centurion’s servant. They were following the Good Shepherd. And these two processions collided at the door step of the city. The widow was in great sorrow at the loss of her son. And when Jesus saw her, He had compassion on her and said, “Don’t cry.”

In today’s passage we learn the amazing one sided grace of our Lord. This passage glaringly contrasts for last week’s message. In last week’s passage we see the man with the greatest faith that Jesus had ever seen. He asked Jesus to just say the Word and his servant would be healed. This Centurion’s faith reveals that we have every reason to put our faith in Jesus. It reveals that Jesus has power and authority by His Word alone. His Word has the power to heal people of any sickness, or disease. It reveals that we should have such faith. But in reality who has such faith as this Centurion? The truth is no one. The great doctor Luke uses today’s passage to caution us not to become too discouraged if our faith is not up to the level of this Centurion. Luke commends the Centurions faith and highlights it, that we too would have such faith. But in truth we all fall far short of this man’s great faith.

The great doctor Luke at the same time cautions us not to become too proud thinking that we have some way to earn or merit God’s compassion or mercy. I think Dr. Luke understood something very important for us to know. Doctors often are credited for saving people’s lives because of their expertise and training. Doctors spend long hours studying the human body and what makes it tick. But a real honest doctor will tell you that when someone gets well, it really isn’t them who heals the patient. The get the credit, but in reality doctors are very, very limited in what they can and can’t do for the patient. That is not to dismiss doctors, thank God for them! But in reality doctors perhaps get too much credit for what they do and perhaps enjoy the credit too much as well.

In today’s passage see someone who is so different than the Centurion. The Centurion was clear headed and professional and calm; but this woman was drowning in the tidal wave of her sorrow, grief and anguish. This woman did not pray to Jesus. She did not exhibit any faith of any kind. It’s important to note that in Jesus’ life, He only raised three people from the dead. One of them was Lazarus. The brother of Martha and Mary. It seems understandable to us why Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. No one could deny that Jesus loved these three. Those who saw Jesus weep when He came to Lazarus exclaimed, “See how he loves Lazarus!” It’s understandable that Jesus would do such a thing for them. Another time Jesus healed the daughter of Jairus, who was a synagogue ruler. He had a position of respect and dignity and authority. But when his daughter was on death’s doorstep, he ran to Jesus and fell at his knees and earnestly pleaded with Jesus to touch his daughter that she would be well. But by Mark’s account by the time Jesus got to her, the young girl had died. Jesus raised her from the dead. Jairus’ humility and earnest pleading on the behalf of his daughter makes it understandable why Jesus rose this young girl from the dead. The third raising from the dead is today’s account. But this account is so different. This woman had done nothing. She was not a friend of Jesus’; she did not exhibit great faith in Jesus; she had not run to Jesus and fall on her knees and plead earnestly for her son. Actually, the only thing she did was cry. It was the only thing she could do. Her hope had run out for her son and her family and for herself. Her life was a complete barren wasteland. But it wasn’t always like this.

This woman had come from the city of Nain. The name of the city Nain means pleasant. This name reminds us of another widow, Naomi, the mother-in-law of Ruth. Naomi means pleasantness. Nain\Naomi- have the same root word for pleasant. Naomi like this woman had her husband die and also her son, actually Naomi had two sons die. I would like to read several verses from the book of Ruth 1:12-13, “12Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— 13would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

And Ruth 1:20-21. “Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almightyhas made my life very bitter. 21I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.” The name Mara means bitter. Naomi at one time thought of her life as full. She had everything she could have wanted. She lived under the blessing of God and she realized it. But now she confessed her life was empty. She had no hope. The woman in today’s passage was just like Naomi. Once her life looked full. When she was a young woman she married a prince charming. He was handsome and intelligent and funny. Then she had a cute and energetic baby boy, who grew up healthy and strong. He probably was one of the team captains of the wrestling team at the local high school; all the girls liked him, with his bulging muscles and confident demeanor. Her life looked so pleasant and full. But then her husband died. And a part of her died with him. It broke her heart, she loved her husband. But she still had hope on her life. She still had her lovely son. All her life’s efforts were not in vain. Her son still lived and with him all her hopes were now squarely placed on him. But tragically he died. It wasn’t supposed to be that way. Children are supposed to bury their parents; parents are not supposed to bury their children. In one instant, this woman’s life went from full to empty. All her hope evaporated. All that was left was bitterness, emptiness and sorrow. This was the condition of this woman. There was no great faith, there were no great deeds, and there were no mighty prayers, like we see in so many of the other healings Jesus did for people. There was only tears.

And yet, our Lord saw this woman and had compassion on her and raised her son from the dead. This story is not a story of this woman, this story is the story of our Lord, who He really is. Our Lord is the compassionate One. He is the One who is merciful. Sometimes we misunderstand and think we can earn God’s mercy or compassion. If we exhibit great faith or pray night and day. We think we kind of deserve God to show mercy and compassion on us. But in reality His mercy and compassion are completely and wholly one sided and one sided alone. Ex. 33:19 reads, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” We never did anything to merit or deserve God’s mercy or compassion. The Bible says, “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” It was His love alone that rescued us. The Centurion had great faith, greater than anyone’s, but it wasn’t his faith that healed his servant. It was Jesus’ mercy and compassion to hear his request and answer it. Again, this passage reveals who Jesus truly is. Jesus could have easily walked right on by this funeral procession and not said a word. But when he saw this woman’s grief and sorrow and that all hope for her life was gone, He had compassion on her. He could not just walk on by. This reveals a great truth for us. When our hope is gone, there is still hope. Actually, it’s the only true hope there ever really was. The hope when all hope is gone is Jesus’ compassion. We mistakenly believe that our hope lies somewhere in something we have or have done. But in truth true hope comes from one place and one place alone, Jesus’ compassion and mercy and love. That has always been our true hope.

There are many servants of God who have devoted themselves to our Lord’s service. They have offered everything in serving Him. Their lives were full and God’s favor was upon them. And there are several servants I know personally who are like this woman. I know one woman who cried in front of me because of her son. She loves her son so dearly and cries for him because he is wayward. Her son confessed to me that he put to death the person his mother wanted him to become. With his own mouth he confessed this. This woman shared with me that when she first was a missionary her life was so full of joy and happiness. But now she cried in front of me for her son.

I know another missionary family whose son made his mother cry. He took a short vacation without his parents’ approval. I heard she cried and cried for her lovely son. I know another young woman who every time she shares her testimony in public cries and cries. It’s because of her husband. I know a young man who is filled with fear over his school studies, it paralyzes him and he can only see his life as a failure. I know another man, fat, bald and talks a lot. He became 50 recently and depression began to set in for him over his life. What they call a mid-life crisis. When he looked back on his life it looked like nothing good came of it. He thought his life was empty. He had a hope that his oldest son would marry by faith a woman of God. But this man’s fear overtook him and he couldn’t overcome it. This man cried in front of his son and wife. I know a woman who has faithfully studied the Bible with her student for years and he seemingly doesn’t change at all. She has served and loved this student, but nothing changes with him. She served another young man, who rose up to become a Bible teacher and shepherd, but eventually he ran away because of his disagreements with the direction of our ministry. I know many coworkers who have broken relationships with their children and their spouses and with one another and with their flock. At one time our lives looked so sweet, so full, so blessed. But for many we have experienced such heartache and pain and grief in our lives that all hope has left us. All that’s left is the tears. We prayed, we exerted our faith, but sometimes it looks like nothing helps the situation.

So where do we find hope when there is no longer any hope? It’s in Jesus’ compassion alone. Our hope comes from who Jesus is, not who we are or what we have done.

When Jesus saw this woman, his heart went out to her. He told her, “Don’t cry.” Jesus tells each of us, who are experiencing similar things, “Don’t cry.” But Jesus’ Words don’t come with only human sympathy. His Words weren’t hollow. When Jesus said to this woman, “Don’t cry,” it came with the power and experience of complete restoration and healing. This woman not only heard His Words, but experienced the true compassion and mercy of our Lord on her life. The compassion and mercy of our Lord who has all power and authority over even the power of sin and death. The Centurion understood the power of Jesus’ Words, “Just say the Word and my servant will be healed!” When Jesus speaks, “Don’t cry,” to us it comes with His compassionate power. Let us trust in His compassion for our sorrows and bitterness. Let us trust His compassion to give us a new and living hope. May He help us not to rely on anything, but on His mercy and compassion alone.

There is one other thing I’d like to share from today’s passage: Why did Jesus heal this woman’s son and not the many other widows who lost their sons? It was because Jesus in the body actually came upon this woman in her time of grief and sorrow. There were surly other women who also suffered a similar situation as this woman, but whose son was not raised from the dead. Was it because Jesus did not have compassion on them? The truth is that Jesus loves the whole world, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

But Jesus had only one body. And He has now called us to be the light and salt of this world. He called us to be shepherds of His lost and brokenhearted flock. We are His ambassadors to this sin sick world, where death still holds its power and sway over people’s lives. “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring Good News.” Each of us came to our Lord’s mercy and compassion because someone came and shared the Good News of our Lord with us. His Word could take effect in our lives because someone shared His Word with us. In the same way, there are many today who are suffering with no hope in this world. Death reigns over their lives. They suffer in great grief and agony and bitterness of soul. Drugs harm our children. Apathy gnaws away at our people. Greed and pleasure seeking destroy countless lives. It’s all around us. We see it in our colleges and work places and everywhere we go. We are to be the one who shows Jesus’ compassion and mercy to. We are to give them the Word of God, that they may experience His compassion personally. May God help us to remember what we have been called to and why. May God help us to not shrink back, but all the more share our Lord Jesus’ compassion and His Word to this generation.

**One Word**: Jesus’ compassion our true hope.