

The Gospel According to Luke / “It All Matters”

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June 19th, 2022

We live in a culture obsessed with Superheroes. The marvel movies of the last 20 years are probably one of the most successful franchises in history. And even if you don't know a lot about Superheroes, you probably know that most of them have a secret identity. Batman is really Bruce Wayne. Spider-Man is Peter Parker. Shadow Cat is really Kitty Pryde. That might be a deep cut.

The point is that these heroes wear masks and hide themselves behind costumes so that they and the people they care about can have something approaching a normal life in those brief moments when they're not fighting evildoers.

But the most famous hero with a secret identity is probably Superman. Part of the reason for that is that his secret identity is mild-mannered reporter, Clark Kent. Inside He's always Superman, but to most of the people around him, he's just Clark. Normal, everyday, suit, tie and glasses wearing, 9-5 Daily Planet working, Clark. Unlike everyone else, Lois Lane knows his real identity and that changes everything about their relationship. When she's in danger, as she often is, - she calls on him, because she knows he'll come. If bullets are flying - she hides behind him and is not hurt. The fact that Lois Lane knows who Clark Kent really is changes everything for Lois. Her knowledge and certainty in his identity causes her to trust and rely on him.

As we pick up in our passage in the book of Luke today, we're going to encounter John the Baptist at a moment where he's not exactly sure about Jesus' identity. And it really matters. Just as there would be deadly consequences for Lois Lane if she was wrong about Superman, the consequences are huge for John the Baptist if he's wrong about Jesus. Can he trust him? Can he rely on him?

Is Jesus who John has been waiting for, or should he keep waiting?

As Jesus helps John in this recorded moment in scripture, my prayer is that this story helps us too. Can we trust and rely on Jesus?

So our big idea for today, is that:

Because Jesus is who he says he is, we can be sure that following him is worth it. No matter what.

And our three points as we look at the text today are that

- The Identity of Jesus Matters
- The Reality of our Circumstances Matter
- The Veracity of the Gospel Matters

So let's take a look one more time at the first part our text and then we'll get into our first point.

Luke 7:11-17

11 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.

While this is a relatively short passage I actually think that we can learn a lot about Jesus from an encounter like this.

And so our first point is that the identity of Jesus matters.

The Identity of Jesus Matters

And when I use that word today, Identity, I use it because I think we're getting to know Jesus here. We're getting to know his heart and his motivations. We're seeing who he is and what he is capable of.

And so in this point, that I'm dividing into three sections, we'll see as we learn more about Jesus:

- a. **Jesus' Compassion** - Who does he choose to help?
- b. **Jesus' Authority** - What does he do to help?
- c. **Jesus' Glory** - Why does he do what he does?

Jesus' Compassion.

As we just read Jesus is traveling with both his disciples and a crowd. This is the crowd that has been following him since the sermon on the mount in Chapter 6. And Jesus and his crowd encounters and bumps into a very different crowd.

Luke 7:12

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.

Luke is trying to make clear to us the deep sadness of this situation.

A woman who has already lost her husband has now lost her son, her only son, in the prime of his life. She is alone. She mourns for this and the crowd (probably the whole town) mourns with her, because her suffering is and will be great. In those days there would be few people less vulnerable than a woman in this woman's situation. With no husband and no son she was almost certain to have a tremendously difficult life of subsistence or outright destitution. Her education would've been minimal, her cultural significance in the social hierarchy of the day would've been non-existent and her income would have come from tedious day laboring or begging at the gates of the town. At the death of her son, this woman stands on the precipice of being an outsider in most areas of life. When this woman weeps, she weeps for her son and she also weeps for all of the possibilities, plans and hopes she had for what her life could have been. All of that is lost and now she is a nobody.

Now last week when Tyler preached we saw Jesus encounter a "somebody", a Roman Centurion. More than a man, a man of status. More than a soldier, a leader of soldiers. And, in this period in history, more than a Jew - a Roman. The Jewish leaders were happy to go to Jesus and ask if he could heal this Roman Centurion's servant. After all, if they help him - he might help them. This is the power dynamic. It could be good for Jesus too. Maybe if he could grease the wheels of power just right, he might be able to keep doing what he's doing.

To those on the outside, Jesus healing the Centurion's servant makes perfect sense. The Centurion asked for help. The Jewish leaders asked for help. Healing this person could score Jesus some points and be good for him politically. Because this guy is a somebody. But the widow is a nobody. A nobody to everybody but Jesus.

Luke 7:13

13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

This woman didn't come to Jesus. She didn't ask him for help. She had nothing to give him and she no status before him. She might not have even known who he was.

But Jesus knew who she was. He saw her and he had compassion on her.

In a crowd like we have here today I am sure that someone needs to hear this. Wherever you are and whatever is going on in your life right now - Jesus sees you and your situation and he has compassion.

Jesus says to this woman “do not weep”. In some ways this would be a cold or a cruel thing to say. Of course she should weep. Her son is dead. But Jesus can say this and mean it because he can take away the reason for her weeping. Just a little while earlier at the sermon on the mount he told these same crowds that are following him “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.” And he’s about to stand on those words in the most powerful way imaginable.

We’ve seen Jesus’ Compassion and who he helps but we’re about to have another piece of Jesus’ identity revealed. Let’s look at

Jesus’ Authority

Luke 7:13-15

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.

Now for those of us in here who are Christians, believers, the raising of the dead might have in some way lost some of its awe-inspiring quality. After all, we worship a Savior who has risen from the dead and our hope is in our own resurrection one day when he comes again. But the raising of the dead in the scriptures is actually quite rare and special. This is something that only God can do and he has done it sparingly. In the entire Old Testament only God’s prophets Elijah and Elisha raise the dead. And this encounter with the widow is the first of three people that Jesus raises from the dead during his earthly ministry.

This is the first.

Up until this point Jesus had healed the blind, the deaf, the sick, the lame and those possessed with unclean spirits. But raising the dead is new. And raising the dead is important. Death in scripture is a result of Man’s sin against God. It is a curse that we all bear. Romans 5:12 says as much.

Romans 5:12

12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

Because of sin, everyone one day will die. Death is something that we have tried to have authority over for thousands of years. And in fact, today, our lifespans are indeed longer than ever due to medical advances. I mean, I have a great aunt who’s 107 years old and she is still one classy lady.

Today’s technologies to evade death includes things like cryonics. A pseudoscience that freezes the recently departed in liquid nitrogen with the hope that one day we’ll have developed a cure for whatever caused their death. In a recent article in the Atlantic the CEO of the Cryonics Institute said that they’re “like a hospital, but we care for patients that are metabolically challenged”. Metabolically challenged. What an optimistic way to talk about the finality of death.

Try as we might, we cannot stop death or reverse it. But Jesus can. As the book of Luke goes on, Jesus will continue to talk about the Kingdom of God and his miracles will show us what that Kingdom is like and who the King is. By raising the dead, Jesus confirms that he is the King. Raising the dead is the ultimate miracle and by doing so, by exercising authority over death, Jesus is revealing to all that he is the Jewish Messiah and the Savior of all.

Right now, this revelation is implicit in Jesus' actions, he'll make it explicit at the end of his earthly ministry when he says to the disciples in Matthew 28:18:

Matthew 28:18

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

Paul in his letter to the Colossians expands on Christ's authority in Colossians 1:15-16 where he says:

Colossians 1:15-16

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

Everything is subject to Christ and at his word, death dies.
Look at this picture that we have. Jesus stops the funeral.
He literally stops the procession of death that's before him and he restores life.
Only Jesus can do this.

Death has no power against Jesus and death has no place in his Kingdom.
Jesus speaks, and the man lives, and the compassionate Savior returns an only Son to his mother.
Where death has come to take, Jesus has come to give and what started as the worst day of this mother's life has turned out to be the best.
Weeping has turned into laughing.

So why does Jesus do this? Why has he come? Is it just because he's compassionate? Is it just because he wants the world to see his power and authority? He does it for Glory.

We'll end this first section by looking at

Jesus' Glory

Jesus does everything he does in his earthly ministry to glorify God the Father. So when he acts, how do the people respond?

Let's finish this first part of our passage

Luke 7:16-17

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.

Fear seized them all, and they glorified God and his fame spread.
At the end of our first part, we see Jesus act and God glorified and worshipped.

Now don't get hung up on the fear part. Fear is a completely normal reaction to seeing a dead man raised. It's a completely normal reaction when you realize that you are a sinner standing in the presence of a holy God. Adam hid in the bushes. Isaiah cried in the throne room. And the disciples in the presence of the resurrected Christ trembled. Yes, they feared, but they glorified God. They marveled at his goodness. They Praised him for his mighty deeds. They Worshiped him rightly as the Lord over all. They glorified him.

So does Jesus heal to show his compassion, yes!
Does he heal to show his authority, yes!
Does he heal so that God might be glorified, yes!
All of these are important and Jesus is a multitasker. He is getting it all done.

When it comes to glory and Jesus and his desire that God the Father would be glorified and this shared trinitarian relationship where the Father and Son glorify one another, we have no better view into the mind of Christ than John 17:1-5

John 17:1-5

1 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

Jesus has come that we might know the heart of God through him.
That we might know the power of God through him and that we might glorify God through him.

What motivates Jesus is the Father's glory and his miracles are meant to show the goodness and power of God and to increase his fame in this world so that all will glorify him.

We see that in the last bit of our text.

Luke 7:16b-17

16b "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.

The town of Nain was only a few miles from the town of Shunem. The town where the prophet Elisha raised to life another son. Elisha was a great prophet in his day and these people know that in Jesus they have encountered someone who has a special relationship with God. Of all people, they make the connection and they are going to tell everybody. Including disciples of John the Baptist.

John and his disciples would have been following the work of Jesus intently. Remember what we know about John. His birth was announced by the angel Gabriel. He was filled with the Holy Spirit before he was born. He's the herald and forerunner of the Messiah. He has leapt in his mother's womb when Mary, who was carrying Jesus, came near to Elizabeth. He recently met Jesus, baptized him and saw the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus and heard a voice from heaven that said "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

And now John is in prison.

Back in Luke 3:18-19 we read

Luke 3:18-19

18 So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people. 19 But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him for Herodias, his brother's wife, and for all the evil things that Herod had done, 20 added this to them all, that he locked up John in prison.

And this experience of John's leads us into our next section.
We've seen how the Identity of Jesus Matters and now we'll see how

The Reality of Our Circumstances Matter

John is in prison for being bold enough to call out sin in the leaders of his day. He will not see Jesus again. He will see any of his miracles. He will be in prison until he dies. But here he is listening, through the reports of his disciples, about all that Jesus is doing.

Picking up in Luke 17:18

Luke 7:18

18 The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, 19 calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

A minute ago I walked us through everything John has experienced and everything he knows about himself and about Jesus. That's what makes this question devastating.

"Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

It shows that God's Kingdom, the Kingdom Jesus is inaugurating, is different from how even John thought it would be. The text says that his disciples reported "all these things to him". Including the healing of a Roman soldier's servant - a military occupiers servant and the raising from the dead the son of a random nobody widow from a town no one cared about. I think we are used to the humanity of the Apostle Peter and some of the less flattering things he has said being recorded in Scripture. I think most of us know of the Apostle Thomas' doubt and his lack of belief until he puts his hands on the wounds of a risen Jesus. But I'm not sure many of us have considered John the Baptist's moment of doubt.

Jesus saw the widow and had compassion on her and raised the dead. And John is thinking "Do you see me?" The nobody widow goes from having her life ruined to having it restored. But the herald and forerunner of the Messiah is rotting in prison with a death sentence. Really? And so John swings from having great confidence to having great doubt. He's sees Jesus' blessing to others, but he doubts Jesus' identity when he is not blessed. The dire circumstances of the widow matter to Jesus, but do the dire circumstances of John? In essence, he asks: "What about me?"

Have you ever looked at other people and how God has seemingly blessed them and thought "What about me?" Of course you have! Of course we all have!

John's in prison. That's his reality. But what is ours?

Are you physically sick and unable to get well? Are you Mentally Ill, Depressed, Anxious, Bi-Polar, Borderline, or Traumatized by a situation or a sin against you? Are you perpetually discontent, frustrated, and can't get ahead? Is there sin in your life that you feel like you have tried to turn from without success for decades though you have begged for deliverance?

Do you rejoice when others are blessed, healed, and delivered or do you ask "Why them and why not me?" Do we trust God when things don't go our way or do we ask "Are you really there? Do you see me?" Do the reality of our circumstances matter to God or should we look for another way? John asks a deep question and it is one that we will all be tempted to ask.

Do we doubt God's goodness when life seems unfair, difficult or cruel and ask "How could a good and merciful God let this happen to me?!"

When you doubt if your circumstances matter to God, brothers and sisters remember the Gospel and when you think that God doesn't see you or you think that your circumstances are unfair, difficult and cruel, when you ask how could a good and merciful God let this happen to me?

You need to stop and ask instead:

How could a good and merciful God send Jesus to die in my place for my sins so that I could be restored to God and one day enter his kingdom with a righteousness that I don't deserve?

The reality of circumstances matter so much to God. Jesus sees you and has compassion for us all. And in Jesus there is nothing that this world can take away that Christ will not restore.

Ephesians 2:1-9 says this about our salvation

Ephesians 2:1-9

2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Where we used to ask "Why me?" In response to our trials.

The Gospel compels us to instead ask "Why me?" in light of Jesus' sacrifice in our place that restores us to God. The punishment our sin deserved, Jesus took - and the righteousness that was his alone, he gives to us freely. Compassionately. Because of his love for us.

Having the full Gospel before us we have something that John the Baptist didn't. But in the next section we can see how Jesus kindly answers his question and continues to give us hope today.

Picking up again in Luke 7:20-23

Luke 7:20-23

20 And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'"

21 In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.

22 And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. 23 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

We have Jesus asserting his Identity as the Savior that John can trust and rely on by way of his actions and his fulfillment of prophecy and our last point today is that

The Veracity of the Gospel Matters

The truthfulness of the Gospel Matters.

Truth has become a dirty word. Have you noticed that? Have noticed the denial of basic realities in our relativistic post-modern culture?

I recently watched a documentary where the interviewer said:

"I'm just trying to get down to the truth"

And the person he's speaking with says:

"I'm really uncomfortable with that language.

You keep invoking the word truth which is condescending and rude."

This line of thinking is not entirely new or novel. In fact, before his crucifixion, Jesus encounters the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate, who ultimately is the one who sentences him to death, and Pilate asks him in John 18:38:

John 18:38

38 Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

But truth is not condescending or rude, and it is not unknowable.

Jesus says in John 8:31-32

John 8:31-32

31 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

The truth about God, about our meaning and purpose in this life, about the nature of reality, about our need and God's redemption is revealed to us by God himself through scripture. And in the scriptures today we see that Jesus answers the question that John's disciples pose to him - first with the truth of his actions.

Look again in verse 21:

Luke 7:21

21 In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.

The question of whether or not Jesus is the Savior is asked, and then Jesus does what the Savior does. The King shows off his goodness and rule over all creation as a foretaste of his coming Kingdom. The herald was not wrong. He invites John's disciples to look and see.

But in case there was any more doubt, Jesus answers with words as well. Specific words where simultaneously he is listing what he's done while basically quoting Isaiah's Messianic prophecies.

Let's look at Isaiah's words about the coming Savior and then see what Jesus says.

Isaiah 29:17-19

*17 Is it not yet a very little while
until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest?
18 In that day the deaf shall hear
the words of a book,
and out of their gloom and darkness
the eyes of the blind shall see.
19 The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord,
and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.*

Isaiah 35:3-6

*3 Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.
4 Say to those who have an anxious heart,
"Be strong; fear not!
Behold, your God
will come with vengeance,
with the recompense of God.
He will come and save you."
5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.*

Jesus in verse 22 says:

Luke 7:22-23

22 And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. 23 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Jesus uses his actions and the scriptures to prove his identity. To show John and show us that he is who he says he is and that we can put our trust in him. Now everything in this list of things that Jesus has done is amazing , but we can make an assumption about what Jesus thinks is most important.

He says:

"the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."

You might think that the dead being raised would be where you would end a list of accomplishment like this. But Jesus ends with the poor having good news, having the gospel, preached to them. And in case you were wondering, we are all poor. There's nothing we can do to earn God's salvation. There's nothing we can bring. There's no influence we have, status that we've attended or privilege that we've been born into that can bring us into God's kingdom.

Instead, we come to the Lord in our spiritual poverty and take Jesus.
And when we do, Jesus' words from his sermon on the mount in the last chapter meet us:

Luke 6:20

*20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:
"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*

The Gospel proves that Jesus sees us all in our need.
The Gospel is where Jesus is compassionate to all of us.

Jesus ends his message to John by saying "blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

That word "offend", it can be translated as stumble. Blessed is the one who doesn't stumble on account of me. Blessed is the one who sees Jesus and doesn't say - that's not how I want to be saved. This is not what I expected. I don't like how he does things. I can't trust him if trusting him doesn't result in blessing the way that I define it. Our Lord is working his will in this world, but because of the deceitfulness of sin he is often working in ways that can be difficult, confusing, or disappointing to us. In those moments we can look to Jesus and see how he responded to his circumstance and the excruciating reality of his coming death on the cross to pay for our sins.

He cries out to God and prays:

Luke 22:42

42 "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

If we want to follow Christ, we must follow his example here too. When we think that the cost of obedience is too high in light of our circumstances we should pray for relief, we should pray for healing, we should earnestly pray for God to change what we cannot. And full of faith we should conclude these prayers in the same way as our Savior "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

When Jesus tells John "blessed is the one who is not offended by me." Our Lord is telling John to hold on to the better hope of the Gospel. To trust and rely on him even if it costs him everything in this life. And Jesus is speaking to us today. Your difficult circumstances may not ever change, but the compassion of Jesus never will either. His power to conquer sin and death are sure and proved and neither of them will separate us from God and his love - Love that was costly and sacrificial, love that will carry you into eternity.

The Good News, for those that believe that Jesus is who he said he was, is that following him is worth it. No matter what.

For those who follow Jesus to the end he promises in John 14:19:

John 14:19

19 Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.
