

# The Gospel According to Luke

## ***“Touchy Subject”***

Chapter 7:1-17

### Introduction

The police were asked to check the welfare of someone who hadn't been heard from in several days; they found him dead.

I was trained to wear gloves when dealing with dead bodies. All of us had gloves on – the officers, the coroner, and myself. We were waiting for the funeral home to arrive to transport the body.

When they arrived, we were all a little startled that they didn't bother to snap-on any protective gloves when handling the body. To each his own; it was nothing for me to worry about... Until one of the men from the funeral home recognized me and put forward his hand, to shake hands with me. By then I had removed my gloves.

All eyes were on us. What would the Chaplain do? Would I back down, refuse to touch the bare, contaminated hand? Or would I show those guys that the Lemoore Police Department was not to be so easily intimidated?

I took his hand, squeezed it, and looked him right in the eye, as if to say, *“Bring it on!”* It was the stuff of legends.

Touching the dead was even more of a problem in the first century. Not medically, but **religiously**. If a Jew touched a dead body, they were considered contaminated and unclean from a religious standpoint. It meant they could not participate in normal religious activities until they went through certain ritual cleansings.

Our text says Jesus **“touched the open coffin.”** He undoubtedly touched the corpse, lying as it was on an open stretcher. When Jesus purposely touched the corpse of the widow's son, it would have

blown their minds. It was something that just wasn't done by a law-abiding Jew.

This kind of contamination-by-contact was also present in Jesus' earlier decision to go to the centurion's house. The centurion was a Gentile, and Jews were not allowed to enter the dwellings of Gentiles (Acts 10:28). If they did, they would be considered contaminated and unclean from a religious standpoint – unable to participate in religious activities. It is one reason why the centurion urged Jesus to keep His distance and not come all the way and go into the house.

Jesus was breaking barriers by 'touching' people who were in need. He was giving His disciples an example to follow. We, too, need to be willing to **touch**.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Say The Word And You Touch The World For Jesus, and #2 Show The Word And You Touch The World For Jesus.

#### #1 Say The Word And You Touch The World For Jesus (v1-10)

These first few verses would cause you to gasp in the culture of the Bible. Jews just did not enter Gentile homes. It was impolite to even ask. Motivated by love for his servant, the centurion did ask; and, to everyone's amazement, Jesus started towards the house.

This was a real dilemma for His apostles. They were committed to follow Jesus; they were called as His special messengers. Would they go in the house with Him? It was no small problem.

Luke 7:1 Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum.

Luke 7:2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die.

A Roman "**centurion**" was the commander of one hundred men. He was a man of considerable power and wealth. This "**centurion's servant... was dear to him.**" The description reveals a decent, tender heart within this career soldier.

Luke 7:3 So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant.

Luke 7:4 And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving,

Luke 7:5 “for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.”

The centurion was a ‘god-fearer.’ It’s a technical term to describe devout Gentiles who respected Judaism but did not become proselytes to their religion. They did not become proselytes because they did not want to be circumcised, and they did not accept the food laws of Judaism. This centurion had personally funded the building of their local synagogue.

The elders presented their case by claiming the centurion was “deserving.” He was a good person, who had done good works; therefore, he must be deserving of God’s help.

God is not in debt to people for their good works. The truth is, we are all undeserving. By His grace, God gives us what we do not deserve.

Jesus didn’t argue the doctrinal point. You need to decide what hills you want to defend. Something bigger was going on than their misunderstanding of works and grace. Jesus simply went.

Luke 7:6 Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, “Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof.

We cannot overemphasize the decision to go to the centurion’s house. It was huge. It was part of the reason that the centurion “sent friends” telling Jesus to not “enter under [his] roof.”

Luke 7:7 Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.

Luke 7:8 For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does *it*.”

The centurion, a career military officer, understood delegated “authority.” He probably had a view of the coming Messiah similar to that of the Jews he so loved: A conquering hero sent by God. He

saw the Messiah as a military man, but one who also battled death, demons, and disease, with supernatural 'forces' at his command. One of the lessons here is that we tend to view Jesus through our own life experiences. That can be good; it can open our eyes to illustrations, metaphors, similes, and pictures all around us.

Luke 7:9 When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"

Jesus is only described twice ever as 'marveling,' which means *amazed*. Once was in Nazareth, at the people's lack of faith; and again here, at the centurion's great faith.

Luke 7:10 And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.

The "servant" was fortunate to be associated with the centurion's household. It brought him into contact with faith; it wrought a miracle in his life.

It's a good thing to be associated with God's household on the earth; to be connected to a Church. God's people are there to lift you up before the Lord.

As far as lessons and applications from this episode, there are many (as usual!). The one I am emphasizing involves the willingness of Jesus to 'touch' people. The Lord had just picked His twelve apostles; He had just given them their orientation to discipleship. Now, the very first thing Luke records, is the willingness of Jesus to go and enter the house of a Gentile. It would have challenged His followers. They were expecting the Messiah to overthrow Rome and establish the kingdom of God on earth. This centurion would be a combatant, not a candidate for God's blessing.

His willingness put Jesus in a place where He had only to "say the Word" in order to accomplish a great work for God. This combination of **willingness** and the **Word** is our point of application:

1. On the one hand, you can be willing to help people; but without a commitment to God's Word as the sole source of all things pertaining to life and godliness, your help will fall short.
2. On the other hand, you can be committed to God's Word, but if you are not willing to 'go' wherever God might send you, it won't do anyone else much good. This involves a willingness to accept the gifts and callings God has given you – the boundaries He wisely sets. Too often we spend our lives thinking about where we are willing to go, but never getting there, and missing opportunities to serve along the way.

The second episode in our text involves direct touch on the part of Jesus.

#2    Show The Word  
      And You Touch The World For Jesus  
      (v11-17)

A crowd was entering Nain. They were joyous, laughing, excited.

A crowd was exiting Nain. They were grieving, weeping, hopeless.

Luke 7:11 Now it happened, the day after, *that* He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd.

Luke 7:12 And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her.

Here was a wife who had lost her husband to death; a widow, now she had lost her only son as well. Someone described the death of a child, before the parent, as “putting a period before the end of a sentence.”

Besides the torrent of grief, there was a flood of fear: Who would care for her? Who would provide for her? What was she to do?

The “**large crowd**” reminds us of their funeral customs. The corpse would be carried on an open stretcher through the city streets. Family and friends would follow, mourning loudly. Others would join the procession as it wove through the streets, until a large crowd was following the deceased outside the gates.

Luke 7:13 When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

We have a tendency to speak with cliches. "Don't cry" is one of them... *Unless it is Jesus saying it!* He could tell this widow, this grieving mother, to not weep because He knew that, in a moment, her son would be restored to her.

If you want to tell someone, "Don't cry," or anything else like that, then it must be in light of a future hope in the resurrection from the dead. It can't be based on "time healing all wounds"; or them "getting over it"; or "everything being better tomorrow."

"Compassion" motivated Jesus. It has been defined as *your pain in my heart*. One anonymous poet remarked,

*"In every pang that rends the heart,  
The Man of Sorrows has a part."*

The words "had compassion" describe a visceral reaction – a physical, as well as emotional, reaction. Jesus was Himself touched by the woman's suffering – her pain in His heart. He's just as moved with compassion over you, for your sorrows and sufferings.

Luke 7:14 Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."

Luke 7:15 So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

Touching the "open coffin" was the same as touching the corpse; Jesus undoubtedly touched the body itself. *You simply did not touch the dead!* His apostles and disciples would be wondering what they had gotten themselves into.

What they had gotten themselves into was the power to raise the dead. No one had been resurrected in about nine hundred years. With a touch, and a Word from Jesus, **he was alive!**

He "sat up and began to speak." I want to mention that the people Jesus raised from the dead have no words recorded in Scripture. Whatever 'beyond-and-back,' white-light-at-the-end-of-a-tunnel

experience they had, remains untold. We don't need accounts of people who were clinically dead to show there is life after death.

The young man was resurrected, then reunited with his mom. Isn't that one of the joys of the future resurrection? You will be reunited with your believing loved ones! That's why we sorrow for their death, but not as those without hope.

Luke 7:16 Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people."

Luke 7:17 And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

Even then, they had **sound-bites!** We like to reduce an event to its essentials. "*What would Jesus do*" is the latest; not bad, but overused. Sound-bites start strong, then trivialize something great. Use them; but don't overuse them.

Compare these two healings:

1. One involved means, the touching of the corpse. The other involved no means; Jesus did it from a distance. We don't even know the word or words He said to accomplish it.
2. In one case, Jesus was asked to heal. In the other, He was not asked; He simply intervened on His own.

There is no pattern, no formula, to discover with regard to divine healing. It is at God's discretion. We can only pray for His leading case-by-case. We ask Him to heal, then receive His sufficient grace for the answer.

In healing the centurion's servant, Jesus had only to "**say the word.**" Here, He **showed** the word – gave it a physical action – by touching the corpse.

There are many ways to 'touch' someone with the life of God. They may or may not be physical, but they are touches that **show** the life of Jesus in you. Calls... Cards... Consideration... Kindness.

If you are moved with compassion, you'll be directed by God how to touch them. If you are going to 'touch' people, it will have to be like Jesus. It will have to be gentle... merciful... tender. It can't be by manipulation... coercion... or the like. It will have to be in a way that shows them the love of God; and that reveals to them the resurrection life of God.

## Conclusion

Looking back over these two episodes, you realize that there were *two servants* and *two sons* in each:

1. The centurion's servant was sick until death. Jesus, as God's servant, would take upon Himself the sickness of sin; He would die, that by Him we might all who ask may be spiritually healed.
2. The widow's son was dead, but would be made alive. Jesus was alive, and He was life; but He was destined to die so we all might live forever.

We pointed out that there were also two crowds at Nain: One entering the city, one exiting. One was celebrating life with Jesus; the other was grieving for a lifeless corpse.

It is a chance to ask yourself, "*Which crowd am I in?*"

1. Are you following Jesus into the "city whose builder and maker is God"?
2. Or are you "dead in your trespasses and sins", already a corpse because you do not have eternal life?