

## Introduction

“Help is on the way,” says the ambulance dispatcher. Emily hears these words after calling 9-1-1. Her little brother had choked on his dinner, and mom and dad were away. Emily is doing everything she can for her brother, but she and her brother need help. Justin is in college, and he is buckling under the pressure of homework, tuition payments, and everyone asking him what his next steps are. Then the news comes that his mom has received a deadly cancer diagnosis. Who would come to help her? Would help come in time?

As we look around, we see tragedy and death among family and friends, in the world. Accidents in the home, stress, sickness and despair, the deadly war we see in the news today—we need help. Who will help us? The grieving mother in Luke 7 has her own tragedy. Her son has just died. She is attending his funeral. Is she beyond help? No. Jesus knows her trouble and will make his compassion known.

### Jesus Comes to Help His People.

#### Part 1

Today we see Jesus doing just the thing he came to do: help his people. And Jesus wants everyone to know that he is here to help. So, what does he do to let people know? Jesus performs miracles. Luke gives us a string of Jesus’ miracles, one after the other, in locations across Judea. The miracles all show us his compassionate character and his purpose: he comes to help his people. Along the way, Jesus attracts a large crowd, a crowd amazed at Jesus and his superhuman deeds. The group may be wondering, “What would Jesus do next?” as Jesus performs miracle after miracle.

“What would Jesus do next?” the crowd may be wondering as they approach Nain and see another big crowd. Now, this crowd at Nain isn’t the crowd that’s delighted or eager to see what miracle will happen next, like Jesus’ crowd. No, this is a different crowd. This crowd is the crowd of shared pain, the “we need strength in numbers because this woman needs a lot of support” crowd. The crowd at Nain is much like some crowds you see today in your lives or the news. It’s the group of high schoolers lighting candles on the football field after a classmate dies too young. This crowd is your family around a hospital bedside, as you say your last goodbyes. A funeral is in motion at Nain, with the wailing and crying and commotion you would expect in Jesus’ day, as they carry the dead son out of the town. And this dead son is an only son, the only son of a woman who has already lost her husband. The whole town feels they should be there; this funeral is tragic. This scene seems like the wrong place and wrong time for Jesus’ eager crowd. What would Jesus do next?

Jesus knows what he will do next. For Jesus, this heartbreaking funeral is not something to avoid or sidestep with his crowd. For Jesus, this tragedy is the right place and the right time. This woman needs help more than she ever needed help before, and Jesus knows that. Jesus knows her trouble. The Gospel says, **“When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her.”** As much as Jesus is truly God, he is also truly human. There is no emotional distance between Jesus and this woman. He is human. When he tells the widow, **“Don’t cry,”** he’s not talking as some cold, far-off deity who downplays her feelings. **“Don’t cry”** is not cold. **“Don’t cry”** comes from knowing what it means to cry. Jesus cried, too. He understands our anger and concern, our worry and despair. The writer of Hebrews tells us, **“...we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are.”** He knows our troubles.

And just as Jesus knows our troubles, he acts. Luke records: **“Then Jesus went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still.”** Jesus doesn’t shy away from this tragic event. No, he embraces it. He shows the woman, he shows the crowd, and he shows you and me that he is here to help. Jesus knows what is going on, and he knows what to do. When Jesus says, **“Young man, I say to you, get up!”** this is what the widow needs. Jesus knows what to do, and then he does it. The dead son sits up and begins to talk. Her son, who was once dead, is now alive. Jesus knows her trouble, and now the trouble is gone.

We all have troubles, too; problems that twist our insides and keep us awake at night. What troubles you? What sits heavy on your mind as you sit quietly at home? You know what the widow at Nain is going through. You know what death is. Death and tragedy let down their hurtful hooks and snag you and me. You have friends who fight battles as relationships fall apart and health fails. You have people you miss this side of heaven. Maybe they’ve been gone for years, or maybe for just a few weeks. What do you think about the trouble and pain in your life? Do you and I say, “Thank you, God, for holding me in your hands and helping me!” Or do you and I more often let our minds cook with doubt and anger and question: “Why is this happening to me?” Or even, “Why *isn’t* God helping me?”

God is not to blame for the pain and death and sorrow in this world. Sin is. God created this world to be *perfect*. But the perfection ended when sin entered the world. When sin came, pain and death and sorrow followed. Now, there is suffering everywhere we look. Pain and death are here. Pain and death are here for all of us, but Jesus is one of us, too. He helps us. He knows our troubles because he has gone through our troubles. Like for the widow, Jesus’ heart goes out to you and me. He knows your pain, personally. And he knows exactly what to do.

When you have small or big troubles, when death enters and friends leave you behind, God knows how to help. God helps you through every situation, even when you think he should help differently. When you see death coming, God won’t always heal you or your loved ones, like he healed the widow’s son at Nain. But God is still good and wise. Know that he helps you. God knows when it’s time for loved ones to recover and when it’s time for them to leave this world. He knows when it’s time for you to endure the pain of loss, of death. And, in death, remember more than ever that Jesus has power over death. With Jesus, anything that comes your way, joy or suffering, life or death, is good. In today’s Gospel, Jesus knows the widow’s trouble and needs to raise her son. He knows your troubles, too. And he comes to help you.

Just like the woman at Nain needs Jesus to raise her son, we need to see Jesus raise her son, too. In Luke 7, we see that Jesus has the power to raise his people from death. We see his compassion. When Jesus raises the widow’s son, he makes his compassion known.

## **Part 2**

Both crowds at Nain see Jesus’ compassion. As clearly as you and I see each other today, everyone in the Gospel sees what Jesus is doing. They see Jesus walk up, touch the coffin, and speak to the woman. Jesus answers their question, “What would Jesus do next?” as he gives the son back to his mother, alive. Praise and awe wash over the former funeral crowd. Mother and son meet each other’s eyes. Jesus makes his compassion known.

The crowd is no longer sharing the pain of the mother. That pain is gone. This group is an entirely different kind of crowd now. It’s as if the crowd of high schoolers is lighting candles on the

football field, and they see their classmate alive again. Imagine the celebration, imagine the stories they would tell! It's like you're at the hospital, at a bedside, as the heart monitor flatlines, and then you see it start again, stronger and stronger. Imagine the celebration! Imagine our awe and praise and thanks to God. We would know Jesus' compassion. We would say: "God has come to help his people!"

The crowd at Nain has the same reaction. They say: **"God has come to help his people!"** This kind of power over death could only come from God. But the people at Nain don't know the whole story as we do. The people at Nain see Jesus raise a young man from death, and they say: **"A great prophet has appeared among us."** They see Jesus only as that great prophet. Perhaps they see a new prophet Elijah, who raises a young man with God's help in the First Reading. The crowd doesn't know what we know. When they say, "God has come to help his people," they don't know that Jesus *is* God. When they carry the good news about the widow's son across Judea, they don't know what we know: at Nain, Jesus' work is far from over.

We know. We know that Jesus is God himself. He sees and knows our troubles with all the clarity and wisdom only God has. Jesus responds to our problems as God, who has power far greater than any power we can imagine. He helps us. Jesus makes his compassion known in Luke 7, and he makes his compassion known in our lives each day. Everyone who sings "I Am Jesus Little Lamb" takes this truth to heart: Jesus knows our needs and well-provides us.

We often forget this truth in our lives, don't we? We forget God when everything is going well. We become angry and unhappy with the life God gives us when things aren't going well. We know better. We know who Jesus is. We know what he does to help his people. His almighty power protects us through our low and high moments, the good and the bad, life and death. His help is always good.

Jesus does what's best for you every time. You and I see so clearly in God's Word what the crowd at Nain only gets a glimpse of: Jesus' compassion. When you encourage each other with the good news after church or share it for the first time with a new friend, you get to tell the whole story. You share that Jesus shows compassion on you every day of your life, even in death. So encourage! Remind each other of that unique security you have: that God himself is watching and guiding your steps. Share with new people why you are not scared of death. Tell them that Jesus defeated death. Tell them that God forgives sins and gives faith and life because Jesus has made all his compassion known when he died for you. Tell them that Jesus comes to help you.

## **Conclusion**

Help comes for Emily as the ambulance rushes her brother to the hospital. Her brother's lips, face, and fingers return to a healthy color as the EMTs clear his airway and oxygen flows through him again. Help comes for Justin's mother as she undergoes cancer treatment and makes it to Justin's graduation in May. And help comes for you, too. Know that Jesus comes for this very reason. Know that Jesus will help you. He will show compassion to you, until you die and when you die. Jesus makes his compassion known. Now tell everyone what Jesus does for you. Amen.