

Luke 7:11-30

Sermon: **To be an heir of the kingdom of God is the greatest role there is**

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written by: Danijel Dragaš



THE WIDOW AND HER ONLY SON

1. After the event with the centurion, we move on to an entirely new scene — one that takes place in a town called Nain. Jesus continues His ministry with the same intensity, just as He told His countrymen: “I must also bring the Good News of the kingdom of God to other towns, for this is why I was sent¹.” That is exactly what Jesus is now doing — the next town on His path is Nain.

1.1 (Luke 7:11–17) Soon afterward Jesus went to a town called Nain, and His disciples and a large crowd accompanied Him. As He approached the gate of the town, a dead man was being carried out — the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A considerable crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then He came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise!” The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited His people!” This report about Him spread throughout all Judea and the surrounding region.

1.2 In the text we read that He was followed by a large crowd — His disciples, whose number was growing by the day, and the people who were amazed by His miracles and His teaching. At the town gate, Jesus and those following Him encountered a procession carrying the only son of a woman who was a widow. Why is it important that she was a widow? To understand that, we must first look at the culture and mindset of that time.

1.3 In those days, if you were a woman, the only way to be socially and materially provided for was to be married. Once married, you received the protection and social privileges that belonged to your husband and his household. If, however, your husband died, the responsibility of caring for you passed to your eldest son. And if you had no son, you became extremely vulnerable as a widow. Your social standing did not put food on your table.

¹ Luke 4:43

1.4 Today, especially in the Western world, it is not so — women are respected in business, politics, religious life, and in the private sphere. A woman today does not need a man to be provided for. But back then, her survival literally depended on the mercy and goodness of her husband. Society in those days did not encourage women to build careers or take on roles within social structures. They were homemakers — caring for their children and their households, while the man was responsible for the family's social standing: for income, position, religious duties, and reputation.

1.5 With that in mind, we can better understand why Jesus felt compassion for this widow. He knew that after the death of her only son, she was left completely exposed and unprotected as a human being. That is why He chose to raise the young man from the dead. If I'm not mistaken, this is the first of three occasions where Jesus raises someone from the dead. The second was the daughter of Jairus, the synagogue leader who asked Jesus to heal her,² and the third was Lazarus, Jesus' dear friend, whom He called out of the tomb after four days.³

1.6 In any case, Jesus now, in the presence of everyone there, brings the young man back to life — another powerful sign that He truly is who He claims to be. The reaction of the crowd was one of awe that turned into praise to God, and the report of what had happened spread throughout Judea and the surrounding region.

1.7 Returning to the scene itself, what stands out to me is that Jesus had compassion on "the widow." I believe that by doing so, He showed that a person's social status means nothing to Him. Unlike the centurion, who held a high position and enjoyed public respect, this widow was an ordinary woman — now vulnerable and without protection after the loss of her son. In the eyes of society, she was insignificant. Yet Jesus does not see through the eyes of culture. He does not think as those who said, *"He is a centurion, he built our synagogue — he deserves that You heal his servant."* In Jesus' mind, no one deserves God's grace — it cannot be earned by high or low status. God the Father gives grace to whom He wills, when He wills, and where He wills — and Jesus does the same.

JESUS' WILL PERFECTLY ALIGNED WITH THE FATHER'S

2. The difference I would emphasize between these two events is this: in the case of the centurion — where Jesus healed his servant because the centurion asked Him — Jesus did so primarily to once again dismantle the false assumptions of Pharisaic teaching, which claimed, *"Only we, the chosen people, the descendants of Abraham, can inherit the kingdom of God."* Why? Because they believed that their "passport" labeled Jew automatically guaranteed entry into the kingdom. But in the case of the widow, Jesus acts purely out of compassion — because He felt pity for her and did not want her to remain alone and unprotected.

2.1 And here we come to an interesting question: how does Jesus know that the Father will approve a miracle in a situation not directly connected to His mission of confronting false Pharisaic beliefs? We know that one of the main purposes of the Father's plan was to confirm the Son through signs and wonders before those who opposed Him. Yet here, Jesus unexpectedly encounters a funeral

² Mark 5:22-24, 35-43

³ John 11:1-44

procession — He meets a widow, sees her sorrow, feels compassion, and decides to give her son back his life.

2.2 In other words, Jesus knew the purpose of His coming. When He was among the Pharisees who opposed Him, He was certain that the Father would stand by Him and confirm His authority through miracles, proving that they must listen to the Son. But here the situation is different — there are no Pharisees, no debate about the Law, no need for validation. What moves Jesus now is compassion, pure empathy toward another human being. Again, how did He know the Father would approve it? We don't know. But one thing is certain: no one knows the Father like the Son. No one is as deeply connected to the Father as He is. And it is precisely that connection which gives Jesus wisdom and discernment — the ability to know, in the moment, exactly what to do.

2.3 So, to conclude: although Jesus' will is perfectly aligned with the will of the Father, He makes decisions in this world on His own — sometimes spontaneously, sometimes intentionally. And in that perfect unity, every decision He makes reflects the will of God.

JOHN THE BAPTIST EXPECTS A WARRIOR KING

3 I think that's enough to say about this event.

Let us now move on to a new one. **(Luke 7:18–23)** *The disciples of John reported to him about all these things. Summoning two of his disciples, John sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are You the One who is to come, or should we look for someone else?" When the men came to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, asking, 'Are You the One who is to come, or should we look for someone else?'" At that very moment He healed many people of diseases, afflictions, and evil spirits, and He gave sight to many who were blind. And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news preached to them. Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me."*

3.1 We read that the disciples of John the Baptist reported to him everything Jesus was doing. Where did they report to him? Let's remember — John was at that time in prison. King Herod had imprisoned him because John had publicly accused him of committing an immoral act — a sin against Yahweh and His Law. To silence him, Herod threw him into prison.⁴

3.2 So when John's disciples told him all that Jesus was saying and doing, he told them to go back to Jesus and ask, *"Are You the One who is to come, or should we look for someone else?"* Honestly, John's question surprises me. He knows who Jesus is. Since childhood he had heard the testimony of Mary, his mother Elizabeth's relative. His father Zechariah surely told him of his own encounter with the angel in the temple. We can assume that John and Jesus knew each other and perhaps spent time together growing up.

3.3 Likewise, it's hard to believe that Mary and Elizabeth met only once. Their miraculous experiences, the angelic messages, Zechariah's silence, and the birth of their sons must have bound

⁴ Luke 3:20

them deeply. They likely remained in contact as their sons grew up. So, if anyone should have known that Jesus truly was the One who was to come, it was John the Baptist.

3.4 Why then the question? Is John's doubt justified? Has he lost faith in Jesus? What is happening here? Some biblical teachers claim that it wasn't John's doubt, but the doubt of his disciples. According to that interpretation, John sent them to Jesus so they could see for themselves and strengthen their own faith. Honestly, that explanation doesn't make much sense to me. We see that Jesus answers, *"Go and report to John what you have seen and heard."* Because of this, I believe the question came from John himself — that he was the one doubting. And yet, this is John the Baptist — the one who prepared the people for the coming of the Messiah, the voice crying out in the wilderness, the man who pointed his disciples to Jesus and said, *"Behold, the Lamb of God!"*⁵ Up to this moment, John had been completely certain that Jesus was the Messiah — and now suddenly he doubts.

3.5 I tend to think that this is not a sign of unbelief on John's part. Remember, John is in prison; he knows he will probably never leave it. He may even suspect that he will be executed. All of this slowly breeds anxiety, fear, depression, and confusion within him. In other words, John has plenty of time to think — and anxiety often gives birth to doubt and to wrong conclusions. That, of course, is my assumption — but a very human and understandable one.

3.6 That said, why does John doubt Jesus? He knows about the miracles Jesus has performed and the teaching He proclaims. In verse 18 we read that his disciples reported all this to him. Isn't that enough to strengthen his faith, even in prison?

3.7 My answer is that, although John's question arises from fear and anxiety, his doubt also has a legitimate side. John was a Jew, raised from childhood to believe that when the Messiah came, He would conquer His enemies, free His people from oppression, and reign forever in the kingdom God had promised to David. John knew the Torah, he knew God's promises, and he knew what God's anointed looked like. King David was one of them — a man who loved God's Law, praised Yahweh with songs and psalms, was a righteous judge, but also a warrior who led his people into battle.

3.8 When John imagined the Messiah, he saw David. And so, his doubt becomes understandable: *"Jesus, I don't see You preparing an army. I don't see You readying for battle, freeing the people from their oppressors. I don't see You riding a horse with a sword in Your hand to rescue me from this prison. Are You truly the One we've been waiting for — or have we been mistaken? Should we expect someone else?"*

JESUS ENCOURAGES JOHN

4. In conclusion, I believe Jesus saw the situation exactly that way — with understanding. His response to John, and what He later says to the crowd, show that He does not condemn John for his doubt. On the contrary, He says, *"Truly I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John."*⁶ By this, Jesus affirms that He understands where John's question comes from. It

⁵ John 1:29

⁶ Luke 7:28

is not unbelief; it is human weakness — moments of darkness. Jesus does not rebuke him but encourages him — to remain steadfast in the faith he already has.

4.1 Let's look more closely at how He does that. Jesus does not answer John's question directly. Instead, He continues doing what He has been doing all along — before the eyes of John's disciples He heals the sick, frees the oppressed, and gives sight to the blind. Then He tells them to go back and say to John: *"Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news preached to them. Blessed is the one who does not take offense at Me."*

4.2 In this way, Jesus points John back to the Scriptures — specifically to the prophet Isaiah. Read Isaiah 29:18–21; 35:5–6; 61:1. These passages speak of God's salvation but also of His judgment upon those who will not believe His promises. God will bring that salvation through One — His only begotten Son — whose ministry will be marked by these very signs: sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, healing to the sick, and the proclamation of good news to the poor.

4.3 In other words, Jesus is saying to John: *"Look to what is written in Isaiah. Do not My works fulfill those very words? Have not the blind received sight, the lame walked, and the sick been healed? They have — and you know it. Your disciples see it. Do not let fear and anxiety imprison you. Use your reason. Look at the evidence before you and remain firm in faith. I know I do not look like a king riding a horse with a sword in His hand, I know I am not freeing the people through battle — but blessed is the one who does not stumble because of Me. Only those who are chosen, those to whom that blessing is given, will remain faithful despite their expectations and preconceptions. They will not fall away."*

4.4 Before we continue with the next verses, I want to say this: John is only human. Any one of us would feel the same in his situation, and that is why I believe his reaction is entirely normal given the circumstances. This is not a sign of unbelief on John's part. He is genuinely afraid that he may have misunderstood his calling.

— But in the end, he must decide whom to trust: his own expectations, or the evidence that accompanies Jesus' ministry. —

JESUS ENCOURAGES US TOO

5. In the same way, this will happen to us many times as well. In our own lives, there will be moments when Jesus does not fulfill what we expected Him to fulfill. Because of the image we have built of Him — perhaps through distorted church theology, or through our own sincere but mistaken understanding of Scripture — life will bring us to a place of anxiety, fear, and confusion, just as it did for John the Baptist. And in that place, a cry will rise from within us: *"Jesus, didn't You say You would protect me from trouble? Didn't You say You did everything for me and that I have nothing to fear? Aren't You my Savior who will deliver me from this situation?"*

5.1 And it is completely normal that we will cry out like that. It is completely normal that we will ask those questions. And Jesus answers those questions — through process, and in fact, He answers us through this very story with John: *"Daniel, I know I am not meeting your expectations, but look at the*

evidence. Use your reason. Read the Scriptures again. Seek God with all your heart and ask Him to show you why this is happening to you. And now, after going through this process, let Me ask you: is everything the Bible teaches still true? Has it answered the greatest questions humanity has always asked? Has it explained to you why this reality exists, to whom it belongs, who God is, and who you are? Do you see that there are real reasons to believe that I truly existed and walked among men?" Jesus says to us: "You have that evidence in abundance, Daniel."

5.2 And then He continues: "Now that your doubts have been answered, stand firm in faith — not because of your feelings, but because of the hope your Father has promised you. And this is the promise: He has not promised you a perfect life here and now. He has promised you a perfect life after the resurrection. Blessed are you if you do not stumble because of that. Blessed are you if your false expectations and your trials do not lead you to reject Me. Once again I tell you: look at the evidence, Daniel, and remain steadfast in faith."

TO BE AN HEIR OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS THE GREATEST ROLE THERE IS

6. We continue with the text. (Luke 7:24–30) When the messengers of John left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are splendidly clothed and live in luxury are in royal palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way before You.' Truly I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the experts in the Law rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

6.1 We read that after John's disciples had departed, Jesus turned to the crowd and began to speak about John. What prompted Him to do this? Did the people begin murmuring against John because he had sent his question to Jesus, so that Jesus felt the need to defend him? Or did Jesus simply take the opportunity to explain to the people who John truly was? We cannot know for sure, but I believe that through this moment Jesus expressed a truth He already intended to proclaim: "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

6.2 Let's take it slowly. Jesus first asks the people what they went out to see in the wilderness. Was John "a reed shaken by the wind"? No. John was not a man who bent under the pressure of culture (the wind). He spoke God's truth directly to the Pharisees, to kings, and to the people. Was he "a man dressed in soft clothing"? No. He did not live in palaces, enjoying honor, comfort, or status. He was clothed simply and lived harshly. Was he a prophet? Yes. In fact, more than a prophet. Why "more than a prophet"? Because all the prophets of the Old Testament looked forward to the coming of the Messiah — but John was the only prophet who could actually say, "There He is. That is Him." In other words, if you were to ask Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, or Jeremiah, "Which role would you most desire to have in God's plan?", I believe each of them would say, "The role of John." John was the one who prepared the way for the very King for whom all things were created. After the role of Christ Himself, no greater honor has ever existed in all of history than John's.

6.3 Therefore, when Jesus says, *"Among those born of women there is no one greater than John,"* I believe He is not saying, *"John is morally superior to every other person."* I don't think Jesus is measuring who was "the holiest man after Me." How could that even be measured? Throughout history there have been countless righteous, gentle, and merciful people. I believe Jesus is speaking of role, not morality. In God's plan for this reality, after Jesus, John holds the second most significant role. He is the messenger who opens the door for the Messiah.

6.4 And now we come to the deepest point: "Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." What does that mean? I believe this: even though John's role here was immense — indeed, no one besides Jesus had held a greater one up to that point — that is still not what matters most. What matters most is this: will you even be a part of the kingdom of God at all? If your role in this world appears glorious, powerful, influential, and honored — that does not save you. If you are a king, a commander, a priest, a pastor, a theologian, a celebrity, a philosopher, or a national hero — none of that guarantees you will inherit the kingdom. On the other hand, a person completely unknown to the world — who was never celebrated, who holds no status — yet by God's choice has been brought into His kingdom, that person is "greater" than John. Why? Because he has received the very thing for which this entire reality was created: the kingdom of God. To be an heir of the kingdom of God is the greatest role there is. Everything else is lesser.

6.5 And here Jesus turns our logic upside down. We celebrate those who fill stadiums, make headlines, and fill the pages of history books. But God celebrates those who were faithful in silence — those who were good husbands, good wives, faithful daughters, faithful sons. Those who endured injustice, who kept quiet when insulted, who desired good even for their enemies. Those who willingly stepped aside for the sake of something greater. Those who were meek and merciful.

— Many of them the world has never heard of, and never will. But in the kingdom of God — I believe — their stories will be told, their lives will be studied, and their names will be remembered. —

6.6 And let us not forget the other side: there are also people who are famous, powerful, and influential in this world, yet deep within — perhaps only as their life draws to a close — realize that all that fame means nothing if they do not become heirs of the kingdom of God. Some of them would, if they could, trade all their titles, positions, and wealth just to be invited to that table in the kingdom. And because of all this, I believe Jesus is really saying to His people: *"If you are chosen — even if you are not a prophet, even if you are not Abraham, Moses, David, Sarah, Esther, Isaiah, or Jeremiah — you are greater than all of them. For even the least in the kingdom of God has a glory that surpasses every honor in this age."*

6.7 Finally, we see that ordinary people — even tax collectors — accepted John's message and were baptized. In other words, they confessed: *"We need forgiveness. We are not righteous. We must return to God."* And therefore they received the blessing — the promise that they would be partakers of the kingdom of God.

6.8 In connection with this, John knew exactly what he was doing. He understood that the Jews had been walking far from God for centuries and that the coming of the Messiah included a call to repentance and return. He declared this openly to his people, and those who accepted it in their

hearts — not just in words, but sincerely — were publicly baptized before everyone as a sign: *“We surrender to the will of God.”*

6.9 I conclude this sermon with these words: Luke emphasizes something very important — “even the tax collectors were baptized.” We know that tax collectors were among the most despised in Jewish society.

6.9.1 Again, why does Luke emphasize this? Because of the Pharisees and the experts in the Law. They refused to be baptized — they “did not need forgiveness.” In their own eyes, they were already righteous. In other words, they were convinced they deserved to be first when the kingdom opened. Tragically, they rejected John’s message.

— The tax collectors may be the least in the kingdom of God, but the Pharisees and the scholars of the Law will not be in the kingdom at all. So who, then, is greater than they? I wonder. —