

To Love God

Fatma's black headscarf stood out clearly as she buried her face into the red flag spread out before her. Her tears did not reach the star and crescent positioned in the center of the casket she was clutching. It seemed no one could peel her fingers free, not even to hold the framed picture of her son in uniform. "My son, my son, my God, my son!" she wailed.

Her husband said to her again and again, "Don't cry, don't cry." He did not want the murderers of their son to enjoy her grief. He did not want them to have that pleasure. But how can you expect her not to cry?

No mother should experience this. My own tears began to flow as I listened to her cries. My tears were not for her son because I did not know him. In some small way through the television camera I met Fatma and I cried for her.

Every day I hear the story of someone who died. But most of the time I don't cry. I am sorry for them, but I don't cry. I don't cry because I don't know them. I cannot love them like their family and friends. I cannot experience their loss.

One day Jesus was travelling south and east from Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee where He had spent much time preaching and teaching about the kingdom of God. Crowds gathered around Jesus hoping that He would heal their sick and announce that He was the king of Israel.

But Jesus continued up the rocky path toward a mountain village of Nain without any indication that He would be a king. He certainly did not look like one wearing a seamless tunic that just anybody might have worn. His leather sandals looked like the sandals of just any villager. But Jesus was not just any villager.

Nain was a village on a plateau that overlooked the Esdraelon valley also called the Valley of Jezreel. With Mount Tabor at their back the crowd would be expecting a magnificent view of the crops on the plain. We read about it in Luke Chapter 7 beginning with verse 11.

Luke 7:11-12 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. 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.

There are two groups. One is travelling up the hill with great expectation of a new era and a new king. The other is coming out of the city with much wailing and crying. There is a dead man being carried on an open wooden frame or an open casket as they did in those days. A widow woman's only son and only means of financial support lay on the bier. Everything that was dear to the woman was now lost. Lost forever so it seemed. She would not even notice the man in the

seamless tunic and leather sandals approaching her. She was drowning in her own sorrow. What difference did it make who was around her?

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

Do not weep! Are you crazy, man? Who do you think you are? How can I not weep? This is my only son. My husband is dead. I have no one. No one! And you are saying to me, "Do not weep"?

But the man who said, "Do not weep" is not an ordinary villager.

Luke 7:14a Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried *him* stood still.

In the law of Moses, whoever touched a dead body or a grave was ritually unclean for seven days and needed to do purification rituals Numbers 19:16-19. So Jesus' behavior would have astonished the onlookers. But the purification rites simply pointed to Jesus who is the fountain of life. He is the source of cleansing and He is not defiled, even by death.

Luke 7:14b – 15 And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." ¹⁵ So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

Suddenly everything is different! Imagine the stunned look on the faces of the villagers. Can they believe their eyes? Did they really just witness the dead brought back to life? They wait a moment for more evidence. Yes! The man who was on the funeral bier is now walking and talking! Shouts break out. The mother is stunned at first but then runs to embrace her son and touch his face and kiss him. It is unbelievable! But true!

Luke 7:16-17 Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." ¹⁷ And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

Jesus showed compassion to the widow. As I watched Fatma on the television burying her son, I got to know Fatma in a small way. As we read about Jesus in the Bible we get to know Him a little bit. Compassion is a character trait. It is something you know and understand about a person. It is something that we admire and yes, we even love.

I cannot love someone very deeply if I don't even know them. But when I become acquainted with someone, then that situation changes.

Let's turn in our Bibles to a very interesting text. It is found in Deuteronomy 6:5

Deuteronomy 6:5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Many people today say that God is unknowable. They say you cannot know God but you can only know His will. Of course we cannot know God to perfection. He is infinite and we are finite. But if we cannot know God, how can we love Him with our whole heart and soul and strength? You might be able to obey someone you don't know with all your strength but how can you deeply love someone you don't know? Can I love Fatma's son if I have never even met him?

I could honor God by treating Fatma's son with kindness and respect even though I don't know him. But can I stand by his grave and weep with his mother if I don't even know him? Jesus place extreme importance on knowing God.

John 17:3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

We need to understand that God worked miracles through Christ. Jesus commanded the dead to live and they came back to life. If Jesus was a liar, God would not work miracles through Him. But Jesus did work miracles and He did raise the dead. Jesus preached the truth.

Now let us ask an important question. How can we know God? We can't see Him and we can't touch Him. If we can't know Him, how can we really love Him? Jesus provides the answer in a most interesting conversation with one of His disciples. We read about it in the gospel of John, chapter 14.

John 14:1-11 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² "In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. ⁴ "And where I go you know, and the way you know." ⁵ Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. ⁷ " If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." ⁸ Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" ¹⁰ "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. ¹¹ "Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.

Jesus said that He Himself was the way of salvation, the way of eternal life. The One who raised the widow's son back to life said that no one could ever see God except through Jesus Christ. Jesus said that God was in Him and He was in God. He said that you can know God by knowing Jesus. Jesus perfectly represented the work and character of God in a human body. This is either

the truth or it is a lie. But God worked miracles to demonstrate that what Jesus was preaching was the truth.

Fatma's son is still in the grave. The widow's son was raised to life only to live a hard laboring life and then fall under the power of death again. But Jesus promised that He would come to this world again and take those who believed in Him to the paradise of God. But He made it clear that no one could be saved except through Him. He said that to inherit eternal life is to know God and we know God by knowing Jesus Christ.

Do you want to have eternal life? I invite you to love God with all your heart and soul and strength. And I invite you to love God by getting to know Jesus because if you know Jesus then you will know God.