

Bible Study Notes

2-12-25

Luke 7

The Faith of the Centurion – Verses 1-5

¹When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. ²There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. ³The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

7:1-5 This passage marks a turning point in Luke's account of Jesus' ministry. Up to this point, Jesus has dealt exclusively with the Jews; here he begins to include the Gentiles. Notice who the main characters are in this short drama: the Jewish elders, a Roman centurion, and the centurion's servant— very different racial and religious backgrounds, and vastly different standings on the social ladder. Jesus broke through all those barriers, all the way to the sick man's need. The gospel travels well across ethnic, racial, national, and religious barriers. Are you willing to work through them as well? Jesus was no respecter of artificial divisions, and we should follow his example. Reach out to those whom Jesus came to save.

7:2 A centurion was a Roman army officer in charge of 100 men. The centurion had heard about Jesus, and obviously he also had heard about Jesus' healing power. He sent a request through some of the Jewish elders on behalf of his servant. He may have heard about the healing of the royal official's son (which probably occurred earlier, see John 4:46-54). He knew Jesus had the power to heal his servant.

7:3 Matthew 8:5 says the Roman centurion visited Jesus himself, while Luke 7:3 says he sent Jewish elders to present his request to Jesus. In those days, dealing with a person's messengers was considered the same as dealing with the one who had sent them. Thus, in dealing with the messengers, Jesus was dealing with the centurion. For his Jewish audience, Matthew emphasized the Roman centurion's faith. For his Gentile audience, Luke highlighted the good relationship between the Jewish elders and the Roman centurion. This army captain daily delegated work and sent groups on missions, so this was how he chose to get his message to Jesus.

The Faith Of The Centurion – Verses 6-8

⁶So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

7:6-8 Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof: The centurion knew that it might be a problem for this prominent rabbi to come into his home, so he had his friends meet Jesus on the way to say that it was not necessary for Him to come all the way to the home. The centurion fully understood that Jesus' healing power was not a magic trick that required the magician's presence.

Instead he knew Jesus had true authority and could command things to be done and see them completed outside His immediate presence.

Jesus Heals The Servant And marvels At The Centurion's Faith – Verses 9-10

⁹When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." ¹⁰Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

7:9 The Roman centurion didn't come to Jesus, and he didn't expect Jesus to come to him. Just as this officer did not need to be present to have his orders carried out, so Jesus didn't need to be present to heal. The centurion's faith was especially amazing because he was a Gentile who had not been brought up to know a loving God. Hence Jesus' comment.

Jesus Raises a Widow's Son – Verses 11-17

¹¹Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. ¹²As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. ¹³When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." ¹⁴Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" ¹⁵The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. ¹⁶They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." ¹⁷This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

7:12 Honoring the dead was important in Jewish tradition. A funeral procession, with relatives of the dead person following the body that was wrapped and carried on a kind of stretcher, would make its way through town, and bystanders would be expected to join the procession. In addition, hired mourners would cry aloud and draw attention to the procession. The family's mourning would continue for 30 days.

7:11-15 The widow's situation was serious. She had lost her husband, and now her only son had died—her last means of support. The crowd of mourners would go home, and she would be left penniless and alone. The widow was probably past the age of childbearing and would not marry again. Unless a relative came to her aid, her future was bleak. She would be an easy prey for swindlers, and she would likely be reduced to begging for food. In fact, as Luke repeatedly emphasizes, this woman was just the kind of person Jesus had come to help—and help her he did. Jesus has great compassion on your pain, and he has the power to bring hope out of any tragedy.

7:16 The people thought of Jesus as a prophet because, like the Old Testament prophets, he boldly proclaimed God's message and sometimes raised the dead. Both Elijah and Elisha raised children from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:18-37). The people were correct in thinking that Jesus was a prophet, but he is much more—he is God himself.

7:16-17 This story illustrates salvation. The whole world was dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1), just as the widow's son was dead. Being dead, we could do nothing to help ourselves—we couldn't even ask for help. But God had compassion on us, and he sent Jesus to raise us to life with him (Ephesians 2:4-7). The dead man did not earn his second chance at life, and we cannot earn our new life in Christ. But we can accept God's gift of life, praise God for it, and use our lives to do his will.

Jesus and John the Baptist - Verses 18-23

18 John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, **19** he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" **20** When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?'" **21** At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. **22** So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. **23** Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

7:18-22 John was confused because the reports he received about Jesus were unexpected and incomplete. John's doubts were natural, and Jesus didn't rebuke him for them. Instead, he responded in a way that John would understand: Jesus explained that he had accomplished what the Messiah was supposed to accomplish. God can handle our doubts, and he welcomes our questions. Do you have questions about Jesus— about who he is or what he expects of you? Admit them to yourself and to God, and begin looking for answers. Only as you face your doubts honestly can you begin to resolve them.

7:20-23 The proofs listed here for Jesus' being the Messiah are significant. They consist of observable deeds, not theories— actions that Jesus' contemporaries saw and reported for us to read today. The prophets had said that the Messiah would do these very acts (see Isaiah 35:5-6; 61:1). These physical proofs helped John— and will help all of us— to recognize who Jesus is.

Jesus Teaches About John The Baptist – Verses 24-28

24 After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? **25** If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. **26** But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. **27** This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."¹ **28** I tell 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."

7:24-28 Of all people, no one fulfilled his God-given purpose better than John. Yet in God's kingdom, all who come after John have a greater spiritual heritage because they have clearer knowledge of the purpose of Jesus' death and resurrection. John was the last to function like the Old Testament prophets, the last to prepare the people for the coming messianic age. Jesus was not contrasting the man John with individual Christians; he was contrasting life before Christ with life in the fullness of Christ's kingdom.

The Reaction To The Teaching Of Jesus – Verses 29-30

29 (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. **30** But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

7:29-30 The common people, including the tax collectors (who embodied evil in most people's minds) heard John's message and repented. In contrast, the Pharisees and experts in the law— religious leaders— rejected his words. Wanting to live their own way, they justified their own point of view and refused to listen to other ideas. They "rejected God's purpose." They were so close to Jesus, and yet so far away. The truth stood before them, and they rejected it. What have you done with the truth you read in God's Word?

³¹ Jesus went on to say, “To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: “‘We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.’ ³³ For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ ³⁴ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ ³⁵ But wisdom is proved right by all her children.”

7:31-35 The religious leaders hated both John and Jesus, but they did not bother to be consistent in their faultfinding. They criticized John the Baptist because he fasted and drank no wine; they criticized Jesus because he ate heartily and drank wine with tax collectors and sinners. Their real objection to both men, of course, had nothing to do with dietary habits. What the Pharisees and experts in the law couldn’t stand was being exposed for their hypocrisy.

7:33-35 The Pharisees weren’t troubled by their inconsistency toward John the Baptist and Jesus. They were good at justifying their “wisdom.” Most of us can find compelling reasons to do or believe whatever suits our purposes. If we do not examine our ideas in the light of God’s truth, however, we may be just as obviously self-serving as the Pharisees.

Jesus Anointed By A Sinful Woman – Verses 36-38

³⁶ When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee’s house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. ³⁸ As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

7:36-38 A similar incident occurred later in Jesus’ ministry (see Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-11). Although the woman was not an invited guest, she entered the house anyway and knelt behind Jesus at his feet. In Jesus’ day, it was customary to recline while eating. Dinner guests would lie on couches with their heads near the table, propping themselves up on one elbow and stretching their feet out behind them. The woman could easily anoint Jesus’ feet without approaching the table.

An Objection To What The Woman Did – Verses 39-40

³⁹ When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.” ⁴⁰ Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said.

7:39-40 Simon the Pharisee doubted that Jesus was a prophet because he thought that Jesus was unable to see this woman’s heart. Jesus will show that He can read the heart of man by exposing Simon’s heart.

Jesus Answers With A Parable – Verses 41-43

⁴¹ “Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?” ⁴³ Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.” “You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

7:41-42 There was a certain creditor who had two debtors: Jesus used a simple parable to illustrate the point that the more we are forgiven, the more we should love. “All men are debtors to God; yet some are greater debtors than others.”

Jesus Applies The Parable To Both Simon And The Sinful Woman – Verses 44-47

⁴⁴Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. ⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

7:44-50 Again Luke contrasts the Pharisees with sinners— and again the sinners come out ahead. Simon had committed several social errors in neglecting to wash Jesus’ feet (a courtesy extended to guests because sandaled feet got very dirty), anoint his head with oil, and offer him the kiss of greeting. Did Simon perhaps feel that he was too good for Jesus? Was he trying to give Jesus a subtle put-down? Whatever the case, the contrast is vivid. The sinful woman lavished tears, expensive perfume, and kisses on her Savior. In this story it is the grateful immoral woman, and not the religious leader, whose sins were forgiven. Although God’s grace through faith is what saves us, and not acts of love or generosity, this woman’s act demonstrated her true faith, and Jesus honored her.

7:47 Overflowing love is the natural response to forgiveness and the appropriate consequence of faith. But only those who realize the depth of their sin can appreciate the complete forgiveness that God offers them. Jesus has rescued all of his followers, whether they were once extremely wicked or conventionally good, from eternal death. Do you appreciate the wideness of God’s mercy? Are you grateful for his forgiveness?

Jesus Assures The Woman Of Her Forgiveness From God – Verses 48-50

⁴⁸Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” ⁴⁹The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” ⁵⁰Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

7:48-50 The Pharisees believed that only God could forgive sins, so they wondered why this man, Jesus, was saying that the woman’s sins were forgiven. They did not grasp the fact that Jesus is indeed God. The key to her forgiveness was faith — it was her faith that saved her, because it was her faith that believed the words from Jesus your sins are forgiven. Faith enabled her to take the grace God gave to her.