



Session Seven

The Gospel of Luke, Pt.4

Luke 7:1-8:18

Questions to consider as you read Luke 7:1-8:18

1) Certainly the healing of the centurion's slave is an important focus of verses 7:1-10. Equally important, however, is the clashing and crossing of boundaries: an ethnic boundary (the coming together of a Gentile soldier and a Jewish teacher); a social boundary (an upper class military man and a working class prophet); and a religious boundary (a man who believes in Jesus' power to heal but, as a Roman, is likely not a follower of Jesus, and Jesus himself). What does this say about the Gospel? Does the church ignore these boundaries the way Jesus did?

2) What does the centurion's behavior suggest about the expectations we should have for our own prayers? Do you believe there is a connection between the degree of a person's faith and the probability his/her prayers will be answered? Why or why not?

3) The case can be made that the centurion's behavior vis-à-vis Jesus illustrates the conviction that as much as God loves us, God owes us nothing. Do you live as if God owes you something or nothing?

4) Look again at Luke 3:26-27. In beginning his own ministry, Jesus invokes the prophets Elijah and Elisha; at the end of the story of the raising of the widow's son (7:11-17), the people respond to what Jesus has done by referring to him as "a great prophet." Now read 1 Kings 17:10 and 17-24. Note the almost exact parallels between the narrative there and the narrative recounted in Luke:

1 Kings 17:10, 17-24

When he came to the gate of the town (v.10)
 She was a widow (v.10)
 The widow's son died (vv.17-18)
 Elijah cried out to the Lord (vv.20-21)
 Elijah stretched himself out...three times (v.21)

Luke 7:11-17

As he approached the gate of the town
 She was a widow
 The widow's son had died
 He had compassion for her
 Jesus touched the bier and said..."Rise"

The life of the child came into him again (v.22)	The dead man sat up
Elijah gave him to his mother (v.23)	"...and Jesus gave him to his mother"
"Now I know that you are a man of God..." (v.24)	"A great prophet has risen among us"

These parallels would not have been lost on the people observing Jesus, which explains their conclusion that he is a prophet. At the same time, however, there is a significant difference suggesting Jesus is more than just a prophet: whereas Elijah first cried out to God and then stretched himself over the child three times, Jesus—as was the case with the healing of the centurion’s slave—merely speaks the word *rise!* and the boy is restored to life. The challenge facing the crowd observing this is not the miracle of a dead person raised to life—they witnessed that with their own eyes. The challenge was understanding Jesus’ great authority, which clearly surpassed that of any prophet. Which means that from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, people have struggled with Jesus’ authority: is he merely a great religious teacher, a prophet, or truly the Incarnate Son of God? Think about how you live your own life: do you live it as if Jesus was a teacher or a prophet or the Incarnate Son of God? Put another way, what authority does Jesus have in your life?

5) The challenge posed by Jesus’ authority and the questions that raises about his identity (teacher? prophet? Son of God?) is reflected in John’s actions in 7:18-19. If you return to 3:4-9, you’ll see that what John expected of the Messiah (note especially verses 7-9) is very different from what Jesus thus far is delivering, so John wants to know if, indeed, Jesus is the one to come. Jesus’ response is, look at what I’ve done (7:21-22). He then says, “Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.” Does Jesus offend you because he isn’t always the Messiah you want/need/expect?

6) What do you think Jesus means in 7:24-25? His question then is pertinent now: when you are looking for God or Jesus, what do you expect to see? Are your expectations about your needs or the Kingdom’s demands? Here’s an unpopular word: *submission*. But the case can be made that that is precisely what is in play here: our willingness (or lack thereof) to submit to God’s claims on us.

7) 7:31-35 is difficult but seems to be saying, first, that the people following first John and then Jesus are annoyed because neither would play along as the people wished them to and, second, that no matter what John and Jesus did, the people weren’t satisfied. In other words, John and Jesus weren’t behaving the way the people wanted them to. What might this say about the church?

8) The issue of Jesus being a prophet/more than a prophet arises again in 7:36-50. The Pharisee (to himself) questions how Jesus could be a prophet yet allow the woman to touch him; Jesus knows what the Pharisee is thinking—as any good prophet would—but, in forgiving the woman’s sins, goes far beyond being a prophet because only God can forgive sins. The issue of Jesus allowing the woman to touch him goes beyond a question of his identity, however. It is an overt demonstration of Jesus’ willingness to become intimate with sinners: in order for light

to shine in darkness, it's said, the light must engage the darkness. How willing are you to engage the darkness?

9) We often talk about the importance of "lifestyle evangelism," that the most sincere witness we can make about the power and promise of the Gospel is in how we live and how we treat people. That said, which do you think would have the greatest impact on someone's perception of Jesus and the Kingdom: your willingness to do good works or your willingness to forgive?

10) 8:1-3, short as it is, is one of the most important passages in the New Testament because it is a corrective to the common assumption that all Jesus' followers were men. Note, in particular, Joanna, who apparently felt so strongly about the need to follow Jesus that she left her husband to do it. It was one thing at that time and place for a man (like Peter, for instance) to leave everything behind to follow Jesus; for a woman to do it was extraordinary.

11) 8:4-15 has attracted much attention because it records one of the few times in the Gospels that Jesus explains a parable he has told. Part of the attention has tended to focus on whether it's a parable of the sower, the seed, or the soil. The seed—God's Word—doesn't change, but the sower and the soil, metaphorically speaking, definitely do. After reading these verses, consider them in light of your own life: those times you've been the sower (and, remember, you can sow with things you do as much as with things you say), what kind of sower have you been? God's word, as noted, doesn't change, but the way we understand and explain it can; what Word have you sown? And if we understand "soil" as our hearts, when in your life has it been hard? rocky? choked with thorns? good?

12) 8:16-18 can be interpreted a number of ways, especially if, as is frequently the case, these verses are seen as a commentary on the parable in 8:4-15. I want to encourage you, however, to apply 8:16-18 not to yourself as an individual but to the church. What do these three verses have to say, for example, to a congregation like ours about the responsibilities and consequences of being a people tasked with the work of the Kingdom?