

“THROUGH THE BIBLE”

PASTOR SANDY ADAMS

LUKE 7:1-8:18

Once, a group of soldiers were receiving training in hand-to-hand combat. The drill sergeant quizzed one of the trainees. "What steps would you take if someone charged at you with a large, sharp knife?" The new recruit replied, "I'd take big steps!"

Luke 7 starts with a soldier who takes a big step. The Roman legion was the finest fighting force the world had ever seen. This centurion had never been defeated – until now! He finally meets a foe he can't conquer - and in response, he takes a giant step toward Jesus.

"Now when (Jesus) concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die." A Roman legion consisted of 6000 men. It was divided into 10 cohorts of 600 men each. The cohort was further broken down into 6 centuries of 100 men. A *centurion* led a century.

The Roman centurion was the equivalent of a modern day sergeant. Sergeants are known as the backbone of the military - the epitome of a soldier. Sergeants are *tough and trustworthy*. They bark orders and lead men. Unlike the brass, they fight in the trenches, alongside their men. And as soldiers say, "There's no rank in a foxhole."

In a battle, men look past superficial differences... fighting for your life bonds men. Perhaps this centurion and his servant had shared a foxhole or two. Maybe his loyal aid had saved his life in battle. Now the centurion is trying to return the favor...

Yet the doctors say this illness is unbeatable. It's going to take a miracle. And that's what the centurion sees in Jesus. Sergeants train men, and mold men, and lead men. This man knew men. That's why He came to Jesus. He'd heard enough about Jesus to know that He was no mere man.

"So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant."

Soldiers go through proper channels, and this centurion realized that Romans were not accepted in Hebrew society. This is why he solicits the help of his friends. He sends the Jewish leaders of the local synagogue to represent him.

"And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue." The Jews pointed out his good works and charity. They portray him as worthy of God's intervention. Yet no human is deserving of God's blessing. Anything we receive from Jesus is grace. Thankfully, Jesus suspected there was more to the story...

Verse 6 "Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You."

This was the opposite attitude - *the centurion felt unworthy*. The Jews said, "Bless me because of me..." He said, "Bless me in spite of me..." This centurion isn't trying to barter *his goodness* for *God's blessing*.

Yet how many of us approach God with that very attitude. Lord, look at what I'm giving, or doing, or sacrificing for you... now you should bless me!

God's blessing is not for sale. It's too valuable to go so cheap. In the eyes of God your goodness is like filthy rags. God never plays "*tit for tat*." You can't earn God's kindness. You humble yourself and trust in His grace.

I love the quote by Mark Twain, "*Heaven goes by favor. If it went by merit, you would stay out and your dog would go in.*" Our dog is more deserving than we are. Faith is not faith in my efforts, and my merit, and my performance - saving faith, receiving faith - is the belief that God wants to save and bless me in spite of my sin, and because of His love for me.

This was the centurion's faith. He told Jesus, "*But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.*" The centurion understood authority. He both gave and took orders. And he knows Jesus has all authority - even authority over disease. So if Jesus commands the illness to leave it has to obey.

Obviously, this centurion has concluded Jesus' rank - He's commander-and-chief of the universe. Faith's confidence is not in *our works*, but in *Jesus' word*.

"*When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.*" Lots of folks know *Who* to approach, but not *how* to approach Him...

The centurion's request was based of *Jesus' mercy*, not his *own merit*. And he submitted to God's chain of command. He wanted the *blessing*, but not without the *bowing*. He saluted Jesus! I hope you'll do the same...

Verse 11 "*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.*"

Nain was a Galilean village about 25 miles southwest of Capernaum. Jesus and His disciples had left Capernaum on the *heels* of a *healing*. There was great joy, and laughter, and hope in their entourage. I doubt if anyone but Jesus noticed the freshly dug grave outside the city walls.

"*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.*" When you visit ancient ruins in Israel you learn how the cities designed their entrances. A city gate was a narrow portal that consisted of several tight, right angle passageways. The configuration prohibited an invading army from getting up a head of steam, and charging the gate. It made it easier for the residents to defend their city. *The drawback was terrible congestion during rush hour traffic.*

On this day, a real snarl-up occurs in the gate of Nain. *A funeral procession collides with a party bus.* A widow's dead son, her only son, meets God's only Son. The Lord of life is coming in - a corpse is going out.

Typically, a Hebrew funeral procession was led by a rabbi. He walked along proclaiming the good deeds done by the deceased. He was followed by musicians and mourners who sang melancholy tunes and lamentations. Jews felt the louder and more demonstrative the weeping the better.

Behind the mourners came the corpse carted on a wicker stretcher. Its hair and nails had been clipped. The body was washed, anointed, and wrapped. The face was uncovered, and the arms folded on the chest.

Behind the corpse came the family and friends - and leading the way was the greatly grieved mother. Recently, this woman had lost her husband. Now she's burying her son. She's a woman living a nightmare.

"When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." On an overcast spring morning in 1986 Tom picked up a rental truck. He and his family were moving to a larger home. He was a cautious man so he was careful to check around the tires before rolling out of the driveway. He wanted to be sure his kids weren't playing nearby. The coast seemed clear - *but it wasn't*.

Tom rolled the truck down the driveway, and crushed the body of his 20 month-old son, killing him instantly. The little boy had been playing in the garage, and had raced out at the last second to say good-bye to his dad.

Few situations in life are as difficult to deal with as the death of a child. One bereaved dad writes, **"If your father dies your past dies, but if your child dies, your future dies. It's hard for people to know the feeling."** I'm sure. A child's death rips open a parent's heart, and leaves a gaping hole.

Yet Jesus understood. He sees this woman who brought a child into the world, and now is escorting him out. Jesus sees her pain and has compassion. Then He gives her an impossible command, **"Do not weep."**

Verse 14 **"Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."**

What a colossal collision! Life and death hit head-on. Light slams into darkness - pain and peace crash - sorrow and joy lock bumpers! A showdown occurs between the Grim Reaper and the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus commands a corpse, **"Young man, I say to you, arise."**

"So he who was dead sat up and began to speak." Jesus crashes a funeral, works a miracle, and spoils the spades of the gravediggers.

But notice the line that follows in verse 15, **"And He presented him to his mother."** It could be translated, **"He gave the boy back to his mom."** What death stole from this mother, Jesus was able to give it back!

Perhaps you're a parent who has a child who's been stolen – *not by death thankfully, not yet* - but by sin, and Satan, and this wicked world. Understand Jesus sees you pain. He has compassion. Weary parent, trust your child to Jesus. He'll overcome the enemy and retrieve that child.

Even today these same two crowds still travel in and out of the gate of life – *the hopeful* and *the hopeless*. Those who laugh, and love, and sing, and believe – and walk with Jesus! Then there're the folks who've succumb to death before their dead – who live in a state of despair.

In which crowd do you travel? I hope you walk with the Lord of life!

"Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." How else do you account for corpses returning to life? "And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region."

Verse 18 "Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"

When the men had come to Him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?' "

On the banks of the Jordan, John had proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah. But since those earlier days, John underwent serious hardship.

When John confronted King Herod's wickedness the vindictive ruler arrested him and locked him up in the Fortress of Marchearus. The Dead Sea prison was the Jewish Alcatraz. I was a blistering hot iron dungeon.

John knew Jesus was the Messiah, but Jesus didn't fit all John's Messianic expectations. John was influenced by the prevailing notions of his day. He was looking for a Messiah who would *right all wrongs, punish the wicked, and overthrow the foreign occupation*. Jesus seemed content with healing and helping and forgiving – *what about some judgment?* John was confused, so he sent his disciples for a clarification.

Verse 21 "And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."

Jesus was challenging John to reevaluate his expectations. All too often we make assumptions about God. We think we know what God should and shouldn't do. And if the work of God doesn't match our presuppositions we question His presence, or His wisdom, or His power, or His faithfulness.

I heard of a man who ignored and neglected his wife. Every day he came home from work, flopped down in the lazy boy, and fell off to sleep. He never said more than a handful of words to his wife.

One day, he felt impressed to do better. He came home early with flowers and candy. Rather than come through the garage he wanted to greet his wife with kind words at the front door, so he rang the doorbell.

When she answered the door, she burst out crying. He said, "*Honey, what's wrong?*" She responded, "*It's been a horrible day. Billy broke his arm. A ball flew through the kitchen window. Susie made a "D" on her report card. The bank called and I bounced two checks. While I was on the phone I burned dinner. And to top it all off – now you come home drunk!*"

Often our preconceived expectations can cause us to misinterpret God's actions. Jesus says, "*Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.*" In other words, happy are the people who can follow Jesus - when He doesn't follow their plans! – who'll adlib when He doesn't follow their script.

Happy is the person who dances with Jesus, and let's Him lead!

“When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?” Did you expect a weak, vacillating reed blowing in the wind, or a chameleon changing colors to blend in?

Verse 25 “But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed those who are gorgeously appareled and live in luxury are in kings' courts.” John was no fat cat living off the public purse. He was no politician or TV preacher. “But what did you go out to see? A prophet?”

Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.' Jesus quotes Malachi 3:1 - a prophecy that predicted Messiah's forerunner. John was more than a prophet. The OT spoke of him as the Messiah's advance man.

Jesus makes a remarkable statement in verse 28, “For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”

This was quite an endorsement. John was as righteous as any human could be in his own efforts. He was the most meritorious among men. But compared to those who are righteous in Christ, John is the bottom of the barrel. Not even John's righteousness begins to approach the righteousness that pleases God – and that we've received in Christ Jesus.

“And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.”

In rejecting John's ministry they hardened their hearts to the voice of God. If they blew off John, now they'll definitely reject Jesus.

In the next few verses Jesus provides a commentary on the spiritual mood in Israel at the time. Verse 31 “And the Lord said, “To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not weep.'”

Jesus quotes a popular jingle you might've heard on the playgrounds of Jerusalem in the first century AD. People say play the flute and we'll dance - but the flute plays, and nobody dances. People talked a good talk, but never followed through. The practices of the Jews failed to match up to their promises.

“For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by all her children.”

Israel was fickle. Rather than *quick to obey*, they were *filled with excuses*.

They rejected John because he was too austere. He deprived himself of common pleasures - whereas, they rejected Jesus because He was too at home in His own skin. Jesus enjoyed a good meal or a fine wine. Neither approach satisfied the Jews.

It's said, “Some people are more interest in looking for excuses than truth.” That was true of the Pharisees.

“Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat.” An ancient Hebrew home was square with a courtyard in the middle. In the house of a rabbi this courtyard was open for his students to gather, and listen, and discuss theology. The courtyard of a Pharisee was open to the public.

“And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil...”

It was a common custom for women at the time to wear alabaster vials around their neck. These ceramic containers held ointments or perfumes.

Verse 38 “And (this woman) stood at (Jesus’) feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.”

Remember, we’re told this woman was “a sinner.” She was a naughty girl. And everyone knew about her soiled and sullied reputation.

“Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, “This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.” The Jews believed in *guilt or innocence by association*. All religion differentiates between clean and unclean – and its goal is to steer clear of the unclean. This Pharisee figured if Jesus was a holy man He’d know not to touch such a sinful woman. He could become unclean.

Here was the amazing trait about Jesus – *He dared to touch, and be touched by unclean people*. His holiness didn’t distance Him from sinners. Grace bridges the divide created by religion. It reaches out to sinners...

But this is what drew the Pharisees criticism. And beware! You’ll be criticized too, if your love for sinners sends you to wrong side of the tracks.

“And Jesus answered and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he said, “Teacher, say it.” Notice, we’re told, “*Jesus answered (Simon)*” - yet no question had ever been asked. Look back at verse 39, “*(Simon) spoke to himself...*” Apparently, Jesus had read Simon's mind...

And now he confronts Simon’s callousness with a parable... Verse 41 “There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii (or \$80), and the other 50 (about 8 bucks)” - 10 times as much.

“And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?” Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have rightly judged.”

Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head.”

Travel in ancient Israel combined dirt roads and open-toed sandals. Dirty feet were a way of life – and it was common courtesy, *and I’m sure it kept the cost of carpet cleaning down* - to keep a basin of water by the door so guests could wash their feet upon entering your home. This Pharisee invited Jesus over for dinner, but never considered Him any more than a curiosity. If He’d thought of Jesus as His Master, or Lord, or even teacher - He would’ve humbled himself and washed Jesus’ feet.

Jesus continues, "You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

Simon had been *arrogant* towards Jesus. This woman had been *extravagant* towards Him. She showed *gratitude*. Simon had an *attitude*.

The fruit of forgiveness buds and sprouts almost immediately. When you're forgiven much, you don't hold back – you love extravagantly.

And here's where Jesus dropped the bomb. Verse 48 "And He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

This was a theological knuckleball. It confused the Jews. They understood only God could forgive sins, so why was Jesus doing what only God could do? Was He claiming to be God? Indeed He was.

"Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Chapter 8, "Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities - Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance." *Who says men have a monopoly on ministry?* Luke 8 lists the loyal ladies who supported Jesus. This was the first [Women's Ministry](#).

And it was very unusual for women to play such a visible role in the ministry of a rabbi in ancient Israel. Usually, women stayed in the shadows. Some rabbis would not be caught dead speaking to a woman in public. Obviously, this was not Jesus' approach. He valued women. He appreciated their gifts, and gave them a prominent role in His ministry.

Luke mentions three of these ladies...

First was "*Mary Magdalene*" - who was delivered from 7 demons.

Second was "*Joanna*," wife of an important official in King Herod's court.

The third was "*Susanna*." Here name means "lily."

I certainly believe the Bible teaches strong male leadership in the home and the church, but that doesn't mean women can't also play a vital role in ministry. These gals and others played an instrumental role in His ministry.

Verse 4 "And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: a sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it.

But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold." When He had said these things He cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Some of the seed was eaten by birds. Some seed failed sink roots and take hold. Other seed was choked out by the thorns. But some seed fell on good ground and produced a tremendous yield.

Then His disciples asked Him, saying, "What does this parable mean?"

And He said, "To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'

Parables are clever teaching devices. They perform two seemingly contradictory purposes at one time. They both blind *and* reveal. A parable will open some eyes while shutting others. It keeps some people from seeing and helps others to see.

If you care little about spiritual truth, and your heart is not right the meaning of the parable sails over your head. It makes no sense at all. But if you care, and you're open and looking, the parable will hammer home the point in a way you can understand. It either blinds or reveals.

In verse 11 Jesus interprets this parable. "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God." The Scripture is like a seed. There's life in the seed. Nothing has to be done to a seed to cause it to grow but to plant it in the right kind of soil. A seed has a vitality that comes from within.

The same is true with God's Word. Spiritual growth isn't up to us, it's God's work. We receive the seed, and it begins to change us inside out.

The Parable of the Sower is one of Jesus' most important parables. This is a *seminal* passage. Here Jesus shares revolutionary concepts about the Kingdom of God. First, the Kingdom comes not with a *pounding* but with a *planting* - not with a *harvest of judgment* but with a *season of sowing* - not with *force*, but with *faith* - not with *a war*, but with *a word*.

The Kingdom of God comes as a seed and roots in people's heart. *But it can be resisted*. And this was a revolutionary understanding to the Jews. The Jews assumed that when Messiah came He would take control of the nations, and force the world to bow before Him. Yet in this parable Jesus says that God's Kingdom won't take root in every heart. Its growth depends on the soil in which it's planted – on the condition of our hearts.

Verse 12 "Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."

The wayside was the ground trampled by travel. It was packed Earth - solid as cement. Sadly, it's like the heart of some people - hard and insensitive. The Word lands, but it's eaten up by the devil. Satan exploits the resistance and stubbornness that's developed.

"But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away."

These are people who hear God's offer of pardon and peace, and want its benefits – but fail to think through its implications. Their faith never grows past a flirtation, and becomes a commitment.

"And the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity."

A third person gets distracted by materialism. There's a spiritual longing inside, but they can never get past the tangible. Money and pleasure are more important than a relationship with God. "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience."

Hardness, shallowness, materialism – can send a person to Hell... whereas *humility, and repentance, and faith* send a person to Heaven...

Here's the point of the parable... *the condition of your heart determines the salvation of your soul!* Make sure you plow up the fallow ground from time to time. Aerated your heart with repentance, and humility, and faith...

Verse 16 "No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lampstand, that those who enter may see the light."

Just shining the light of Jesus is not enough. Turning your life into a candle is only half the mission. Positioning that candle on a candlestick so all the world can see the light is the Christian's greater goal.

"For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light."

Recently, I read a report of the proliferation of wiretaps and bugging devices and miniature cameras. Be careful! Today, you never know when you're being recorded.

Yet according to Jesus this is nothing new. It's always been the case. God is recording our every action. He's eavesdropping in on every word. One day, all the skeletons will come toppling out of the closet...

Verse 18 "Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him." Here's a principle. Spiritually speaking, the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.

Listen to God - receive from God, and He pours out more into your life. But turn a deaf ear to God, and you effectively shut out His blessings. You cut yourself off from God's kindness. Jesus says, "Take heed how you hear." *Do you listen with your heart?*

Helen Keller was born deaf, dumb, and blind - but when she was taught how to communicate, and told about Jesus, she commented, "I always knew there was such a person." Helen never saw with her eyes, nor heard with her ears - but her heart picked up on the message of God.

Here's the moral of the story, if you want to know God maintain your heart like tender soil, and keep your mind humble and open to God.