

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

LUKE 7:1-8:21

Once, a group of soldiers was undergoing training in hand-to-hand combat. The drill sergeant quizzed a new recruit. "What steps would you take if someone charged at you with a large knife?" The young soldier replied, "I would take big steps!..." Well, Luke 7 starts with a soldier who takes a big step toward Jesus.

The Roman legion was the finest fighting force the world has ever seen. This centurion had never been defeated, *until now!* He meets a foe he can't conquer, and in response, he takes a giant step toward Jesus.

Chapter 7, "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 and was divided into ten cohorts of 600 men each. The cohort was further broken down into six centuries of 100 men. And a *centurion* led a century. This Roman centurion was the equivalent of our modern-day sergeant.

And sergeants are the backbone of any 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 is no rank in a foxhole.**” In the midst of battle, men look past superficial differences. Fighting for one’s life bonds men together.

Perhaps this centurion and his servant had shared a foxhole or two. Maybe this loyal aid had saved his life. *And now the centurion is trying to return the favor...*

Yet the doctors say this illness incurable. It’ll take a miracle. And that’s what the centurion sees in Jesus.

Sergeants train men, mold men, lead men. **They know men.** Thus, He came to Jesus. He had heard enough about Jesus to know *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 know to go through proper channels, and this centurion realized that Romans were not accepted in Hebrew society. This is why he solicited the help of his friends. He sends the Jewish leaders from 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 try to gain Jesus’ attention by pointing to the centurion’s good works and charitable deeds. 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 actually opposite the attitude the Jews had represented - *the centurion felt unworthy*. The Jews portrayed his attitude as, "Bless, because of me..." but he actually said, "Bless, in spite of me..." The centurion isn't trying to barter *his goodness for God's blessing*...

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

Realize, God's blessing is not for sale. It's too valuable. In the eyes of God, your goodness is like filthy rags. God never plays "*tit for tat*." "**Tit for tat ain't where it's at.** None of us can earn God's kindness. All we can do is humble ourselves and trust in *His grace*."

Mark Twain once said, "**Heaven goes by favor. If it went by merit, you would stay out and your dog would go in.**" Faith is not faith in my efforts, or my merit, or my performance - *saving faith, receiving faith* - is the belief that God is willing to save me and bless me in spite of my sin, and because of His love for me. It's all grace.

This was the centurion's faith.

He told Jesus in verse 7, "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."

This centurion understood authority. He both gave and took orders. And he knew Jesus had all authority, even over disease. If Jesus orders this illness to leave, it has to obey. Obviously, the centurion had concluded Jesus' rank as commander-in-chief of the universe.

His faith was not in *his 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!" A lot of folks today know *Who* to approach (Jesus), but not *how* to approach Him...

This centurion did two things right: He trusted Jesus' mercy, and submitted to God's chain of command...

The centurion didn't ask for a *blessing*, without first *bowing*. He saluted Jesus, and acknowledged Him as Commander! And when we approach Jesus we should do the same... "And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick."

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 25 miles southwest of Capernaum.

Jesus and His disciples had left Capernaum on the *heels* of a *healing*. There was great joy, 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.” Visit Israel’s ancient ruins and 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 congestion in rush hour traffic.

And 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.

A Hebrew funeral procession was led by a rabbi, proclaiming the good deeds of the deceased. Behind the rabbi came the musicians and mourners singing sad lamentations. For the Jews the louder the better.

Then came the corpse on a wicker stretcher. Its hair and nails were clipped. It was washed, anointed, and wrapped. Behind the corpse came 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 living out a nightmare.

Verse 13, “When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.”

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 is now escorting him out. Jesus sees her pain and has compassion. He tells her, "*Do not weep.*"

"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!

Here, 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... He works a miracle... and the Lord of life spoils the spades of the gravediggers.

But notice the line that follows, verse 15, "*And He presented him to his mother.*" It could be translated, "*He gave the boy back to his mom.*" What death had stolen 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, by Satan, by a wicked world. Understand Jesus sees your pain *and has compassion*. Weary parent, give your child to Jesus. He can

overcome the enemy, raise up your child, and in time present that child back to you.

Even today, the same two crowds we saw in Nain still travel in and out of life's gate - *the hopeful* and *the hopeless*. In one crowd there's those who laugh, love, sing, believe, and walk with Jesus! In the other crowd are people who've succumbed to death before they're dead - they 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 a miraculous healing and a corpse returning to life?

“And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region. 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 River, John the Baptist had proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah. But since those earlier days, John had undergone serious hardship.

When John confronted King Herod's wickedness the vindictive ruler arrested him and jailed John in the Dead Sea, Fortress of Marchearus. It was the Jewish Alcatraz. It was a blistering hot desert dungeon.

John knew Jesus was the Messiah, but Jesus didn't fit all of John's Messianic expectations. John had been 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 for clarification.

Verse 21 “And that very hour (Jesus) 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.” And Jesus quotes from Isaiah 35, a passage known to speak of the Messiah’s ministry... “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.” Jesus was challenging John to re-align his expectations according to the Scripture.

All too often we have expectations of God that God hasn't promised. We think we know what God should and shouldn't do. And if the work of God doesn't match up with our presuppositions we question His presence, or His wisdom, or His power, or even His faithfulness.

Once a man who had been a horrible husband came to the CalvaryCSM Men's Discipleship on Wednesdays and was transformed. He was determined to do better.

The next night he came home early from work with flowers and candy. Rather than come through the garage as usual,

he wanted to greet his wife with kind words at the front door, so he rang the doorbell.

When she answered, *she just burst out crying!*

The husband said, "*Honey, what's wrong?*" She replied, "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 wrong expectations cause us to misinterpret someone's actions. This was John's mistake.

And Jesus challenges him, "**Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.**" In other words, happy are people who *follow Jesus* even when *He doesn't follow their plans!* Happy are those who'll ad-lib when Jesus doesn't keep to their script. In still other words, **if you want to dance with Jesus, you have to let 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?" John wasn't a flimsy, vacillating reed bending to the wind of public opinion?

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.

"**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**

(and Jesus quotes Malachi 3:1 which predicted Messiah's forerunner): 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You.' John was more than a mere prophet. The OT spoke of him as the Messiah's advance man.

And then Jesus makes a remarkable statement, 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 have the righteousness of Christ, he's at the bottom of the barrel. Not even John's goodness begins to approach the righteousness that pleases God, and that **we** receive in Christ Jesus.

And John the Baptist was a kind of dividing line in Israel at the time. He revealed the hearts of the people.

"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 call to repent the Jewish leaders had hardened their hearts to God.

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.” Here, Jesus quotes a popular jingle you would’ve heard on a Jerusalem playground in the first century AD. People say play the flute and we’ll dance, but the flute plays, and nobody dances.

They talked a good talk, but never followed through.

And this was the Jews at the time of John and Jesus. They claimed to love God but never acted accordingly.

“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 and filled with excuses.

They rejected John because he was too austere. He deprived himself of common pleasures. Whereas, they called Jesus a drunk and glutton - because He enjoyed the God-given pleasures of a good meal or a fine wine.

Neither austerity nor moderation satisfied the Jews.

It’s said, “Some people are more interest in looking for excuses than truth.” That was 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 usually square, with a courtyard in the middle. In the house of a rabbi, this courtyard was open for his students to gather, and listen to teaching, 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 at the time for women 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 she was “a sinner.” She’d been a naughty girl. And everyone in the city 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.”

Remember the Jews believed in *guilt by association*.

Religion differentiates between good and bad, clean and unclean, with the goal of avoiding the unclean. The Pharisee figured if Jesus was holy He’d know not to touch such a sinful woman. He could become unclean.

Yet this points out an 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 that religion creates. It reaches out to sinners...* This is what drew the Pharisees’ criticism.

And beware! You'll be criticized too if your love for sinners takes you to the 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 was asked. Look back at verse 39, “*(Simon) spoke to himself...*” Jesus read Simon's mind, and now he confronts his callousness with a parable...

Verse 41 “*There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed 500 denarii (about \$80), and the other 50 (about 8 bucks)*” One man owed ten times as much as the other man. “*And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both.*”

Then Jesus asked, “*Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?*” Simon answered and said, “*I suppose the one whom he forgave more.*” And (Jesus) 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. Thus, it was a common courtesy to keep a basin of water by the door of your home so guests could wash their dirty feet upon entering.

This Pharisee had invited Jesus for dinner, but never considered Him any more than a curiosity. If He'd thought of Jesus as His Master, or Lord, or 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 *negligent* towards Jesus. This woman had been *extravagant*. She showed *gratitude*. He had an *attitude*.

The fruit of forgiveness, *which is love*, sprouts almost *immediately*. When you're forgiven much, you won't hold back, you'll also love Jesus extravagantly.

And here's where Jesus drops 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 the theological knuckleball. It confused the Jews. They were rightly taught that only God could forgive sins, so why was Jesus doing what only God can do? *Was He claiming to be God?* Indeed He was.

Verse 50, "Then (Jesus) said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Chapter 8, "Now it came to pass, afterward, that (Jesus) 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 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 even be caught dead speaking to a woman in public.

Obviously, this was far from Jesus' approach. He valued women. Our Lord appreciated their gifts and gave women believers a prominent role in His ministry.

And Luke mentions three of these ladies by name...

First, was *“Mary Magdalene”* - who was delivered from seven demons... Second, was *“Joanna”* - wife of a politically important official in King Herod's court... And third, was *“Susanna”* - who's name means *“lily.”*

I believe the Bible teaches male leadership in the home and in 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 Jesus' ministry.

In verse 4, Jesus tells the famous parable of the sower. *“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!"

Seed that fell by the road failed to take root and was eaten by birds... Seed that landed on the rocks - its shallow roots were burned up... Seed that fell among the thorns was choked out... But the seed that "*fell on good ground*" ended up producing 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.'

A parable is a teaching device that performs two contradictory purposes simultaneously - it blinds *and* reveals. It opens some eyes while shutting others.

If you care little about spiritual truth, and your heart isn't right toward God the meaning of the parable sails over your head. It's eludes you... But if you're seeking God and His truth the parable hammers home the point in a way you can understand. *It either blinds or reveals.*

In verse 11, Jesus interprets the parable of the sower. "**Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.**"

The Scripture is like seed. There's life in it. Nothing has to be done to 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 all God's work. We receive the seed, and it changes us from the inside out.

The Parable of the Sower is one of Jesus' most important parables. It's a *seminal* passage. Here, He shares revolutionary concepts about God's Kingdom.

First, God's 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* - and not with a *war*, but with a *word*. The Kingdom of God comes as a seed and takes root in people's hearts.

But, *and here's the second point*, it can be resisted. This was a revolutionary understanding to the Jews.

Jews assumed that when Messiah came He'd take control of nations, and force the world to bow at His feet. Yet in this parable, Jesus says God's Kingdom won't take root in all hearts. Its growth depends on the soil in which it's planted - the condition of our hearts.

In verse 12 He says, "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 travelers. It was packed Earth - hard pan - like the insensitive hearts of some people. The Word lands there, but it's eaten up by the devil and doubt. Satan exploits the resistance and stubbornness that's there.

"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." There

are people who hear God's offer of pardon and peace - want it - but fail to think through the implications. Their faith never grows past a flirtation into a dedication. It's never rooted in 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.” These are folks who get distracted by materialism. They have a spiritual longing, but money and pleasure are more important than a relationship with God. The tangible chokes out the spiritual.

“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.”

While **hardness, shallowness, and materialism** can send a person to Hell... **Humility, repentance, and faith** send a person to Heaven... **The condition of your heart determines the salvation of your soul!**

This is why we need to plow up the hard ground of our hearts from time to time. Every so often we should aerate our heart with repentance, 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 is the Christian's greater goal. And God will do just that if we're willing to rise up and act boldly.

“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 on the proliferation of wiretaps, bugging devices, and miniature cameras. Be careful! You never know when you’re being recorded.

Yet this is nothing new. According to Jesus, it’s always been the case. God is recording our every action - eavesdropping in on every conversation. And one day, all the skeletons will topple 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.” *With your heart, are you listening to God?*

Verse 19, “Then His mother and brothers came to Him...” Notice, Luke doesn’t mention Jesus’ step-dad, Joseph. We assume that by now Joseph has died.

According to Matthew 13:55 after the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph had at least four more sons and two daughters. Here, Jesus’ mother, Mary, and brothers track Him down. *They’re concerned. They need to talk!*

But they “Could not approach Him because of the crowd. And it was told Him by some, who said, ‘Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You.’” Luke doesn’t actually tell us their motive in wanting to see Jesus. Perhaps they could see He was on a threatening course. He was agitating the religious hierarchy and danger was on the horizon.

John 7:5 tells us at this point, Jesus’ own brothers didn’t believe in Him. Maybe they had never been told of His miraculous birth or had just refused to believe. He was *their brother*, how could He be *God’s Son*?

I’m sure Mary saw His identity clearer. She had more information... Yet, on His last visit home to Nazareth, Jesus had almost been thrown off a cliff. His brothers questioned *His sanity*. Mary cared about *His safety*.

Yet in verse 21 Jesus Himself redefines His family.

“He answered and said to them, My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.” Wow. *And did these words hurt His Mom? I’m sure they did. Did they bother His brothers? You bet.*

But you can’t please God and not offend your unbelieving family. There are ties that run deeper than physical family. Allegiance to God is stronger glue than the same last name. Earthly bonds last 60-70 years, but God’s family is eternal. It’s been said, “**Blood is thicker than water, but Spirit is thicker than blood.**”

And Jesus is still adding to His family? If you’d like to know Jesus as your Savior and Lord you certainly can!