

CONCERNING THE WAY

February 7, 2012

LESSON 128: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE



Chapter 7

In this section Jesus performs more miraculous signs (which again authenticated that He is the Messiah: 7:1-17, 36-50; 8:22-56) and we hear more of His teaching. Luke emphasized His teaching, which has authority because of the symbolic miraculous events which show that Jesus is the Messiah.

Luke 7:1 After Jesus had finished saying all these things in the hearing of the people, he went to Capernaum.

After Jesus' sermon (chap. 6), which was given outside of town, He went to Capernaum, His adopted hometown where He did many of His messianic sign miracles. Capernaum was on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, 680 ft. below sea level. It was a major trade and economic center in the North Galilean region.

Luke 7:2-5 There a centurion's servant, whom he valued highly, was sick and about to die. (3) When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him to ask him to come and save his servant's life. (4) So they went to Jesus and begged him repeatedly, "He deserves to have this done for him, (5) because he loves our people and built our synagogue for us."

- A centurion was a noncommissioned officer in the Roman army or one of the auxiliary territorial armies, commanding a centuria of 100 men or more. The responsibilities of centurions were similar to modern junior officers, but there was a wide gap in social status between them and officers, and relatively few were promoted beyond the rank of senior centurion. The Roman troops stationed in Judea were auxiliaries, who would normally be rewarded with Roman citizenship after 25 years of service. Some of the centurions may have served originally in the Roman legions (regular army) and received their citizenship at enlistment. Others may have inherited it, like the apostle Paul.
- Just the fact that he was a centurion meant he was no ordinary man. The centurions were the backbone of the Roman army. Wherever they are spoken of in the New Testament they are spoken of well (Luke 23; 47; Acts 10:22; 22:26; 23:17, 23, 24; 24:23; 27:43). Polybius, the historian, describes their qualifications. They must be not so much "*seekers after danger as men who can command, steady in action, and reliable; they ought not to be over anxious to rush into the fight; but when hard pressed they must be ready to hold their ground and die at their posts.*" The centurion must have been a man amongst men or he would never have had that position.
- He had a relationship with his slave that was very unusual in those days. He loved this man and would go to any trouble to save him. In Roman law a slave was defined as a living tool; he had no rights; a master could abuse him and even kill him if he wanted to. A Roman writer on estate management advised the farmer to examine his equipment every year and to throw out what was old and broken, and to do the same with his slaves. Normally when a slave was past his working age he was thrown out to die. So this was very unusual.

- He was obviously a rare Gentile who loved the Jews and worshipped the true God. He must have read the scriptures and become a believer, and seemed to recognize that Jesus was the Messiah.
- He must have been wealthy, because he had servants and he built a synagogue for the Jews! You might wonder if that got him in trouble with his Roman superiors, but probably not. The Romans encouraged religion because it tended to keep people in order. Augustus recommended the building of synagogues for that very reason. But this centurion was no administrative cynic; he was a sincerely devout man.
- He was a humble man. He knew that a strict Jew was forbidden by the law to enter the house of a gentile (Acts 10:28); just as he was forbidden to allow a gentile into his house or have any communication with him. He would not come to Jesus himself. He persuaded his Jewish friends to approach him.

Luke 7:6-10 So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to tell Jesus, "Sir, stop troubling yourself. For I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. (7) That's why I didn't presume to come to you. But just say the word, and let my servant be healed. (8) For I, too, am a man under authority and have soldiers under me. I say to one 'Go' and he goes, to another 'Come' and he comes, and to my servant 'Do this' and he does it." (9) When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him. Turning to the crowd that was following him, he said, "**I tell you, not even in Israel have I found this kind of faith!**" (10) Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant in perfect health.

- So we see the centurion had real faith. He knew what authority was all about, and he knew Jesus had proven that he had authority from God. He had that perfect confidence which looks up and says, "Lord, I know you can do this." If only we had a faith like that, we would see more miracles in our lives.
- Jesus was amazed to see this kind of faith in anyone, much less in a gentile!

Luke 7:11-16 Soon afterwards, Jesus went to a city called Nain. His disciples and a large crowd were going along with him. (12) As he approached the entrance to the city, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was with her. (13) When the Lord saw her, he felt compassion for her. He said to her, "**You can stop crying.**" (14) Then he went up and touched the open coffin, and the men who were carrying it stopped. He said, "**Young man, I say to you, get up!**" (15) The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. (16) Fear gripped everyone, and they began to praise God, saying, "A great prophet has appeared among us," and "God has helped his people."

- Nain was a day's journey from Capernaum (about 25 miles). Notice – a large crowd was following Jesus.
- This is one of the most beautiful stories in all the gospels. There is a great poignancy here. The funeral procession would be headed by the band of professional mourners with their flutes and their cymbals. Think about the grief and sorrow in the sentence, "He was his mother's only son and she was a widow." So now she was completely alone. Help for widows is a major theme in both the Old and the New Testaments. Jesus' heart went out to her and He immediately began to comfort her.

- This shows us that, against the sorrow and tragedy of human life, there is the compassion of Christ. Jesus was moved to the depths of his heart. There is no stronger word in the Greek language for sympathy and again and again in the gospel story it is used of Jesus (Matthew 14:14; 15:32; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 8:2). He cares, He feels our pain.
- Yes, God has feelings! In the ancient world, apart from Judaism, this was a foreign idea. The most popular faith in that time was Stoicism, which came from the ancient Greeks. The Stoics believed that the primary characteristic of God was apathy, incapability of feeling. This was their argument - if someone can make another sad or sorry, glad or joyful, it means that, at least temporarily, he can influence that other person. If he can influence him that means that, at least temporarily, he is greater than that other person. Now, no one can be greater than God; so, no one can influence God; therefore, in the nature of things, God must be incapable of feeling.
- It was a dramatic moment. Jesus went up and touched the bier. It was not a coffin as we think of coffins; coffins were not used in the east, that's a western tradition. It could have been just a flat litter that the boy's body was carried on, or many times long wicker-work baskets were used for carrying the body to the grave.

Luke 7:17-20 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding countryside. (18) John's disciples told him about all these things. So John called two of his disciples (19) and sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the Coming One, or should we wait for someone else?" (20) When the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the Coming One, or should we wait for someone else?'"

- This passage is somewhat controversial for some because it looks like John is doubting that Jesus is the Messiah. There are several theories about the reason for this:
 - Some think John asked this for the sake of his disciples. He was sure enough; but they had their doubts and he wanted Jesus to answer their doubts Himself.
 - Some think John wanted to hurry Jesus along because he thought it was time Jesus moved towards proclaiming Himself as Messiah and establishing His kingdom.
 - I think the most likely explanation is this: This event happened while John was in prison (Matt. 11:2). John had had a spectacular ministry which lasted for no more than a year. John expected that the Messiah would set up the kingdom as he had been announcing. But suddenly John found himself in prison and in danger of being put to death, and still the kingdom had not come. So John was starting to get confused about Jesus. He knew the Old Testament well and knew of the works of the Messiah—but he did not see Jesus doing anything about establishing the kingdom. Things were not progressing the way John had expected.
- This just goes to show us that even a spirit-led believer like John can have doubts, can get confused about what God is doing. John was in prison facing his possible death, and he may not have been expecting that. He may even have been hoping and expecting that Jesus would rescue him and overthrow Herod's rule.

Luke 7:21-23 At that time Jesus had healed many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits and had given sight to many who were blind. (22) So he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have observed and heard: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear again, the dead are raised, and the destitute hear the good news."

(23) How blessed is anyone who is not offended by me!"

- Jesus pointed to the facts by quoting the great messianic prophecy of Isaiah 61:1. The sick and the suffering and the poor were experiencing the power of God and hearing the word of the Good News. But this was probably not the answer John expected. If Jesus was God's anointed one, John would have expected him to say, "My armies are gathering. Caesarea, the headquarters of the Roman government, is about to fall. The sinners are being obliterated. And judgment has begun." He would have expected Jesus to say, "The wrath of God is beginning." But Jesus said, "The mercy of God is here."
- We should remember that the kingdom of God is about more than just Jesus bringing judgment to a wicked world. It is about sickness turned to health and sorrow turned to joy, where suffering and death and evil are defeated. Jesus' answer was, "Go back and tell John that the love of God is here".

Luke 7:24-28 When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John. **"What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? (25) Really, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fancy clothes? See, those who wear fine clothes and live in luxury are in royal palaces. (26) Really, what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and even more than a prophet! (27) This is the man about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' (28) I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John. Yet even the least important person in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."**

- The picture of a "reed shaken by the wind" was a very common sight in Israel. Jesus was asking, "Did you expect to see just a common everyday guy?"
- First, Jesus pays John a great compliment. Everyone who knew the scriptures expected that before God's anointed king arrived on the earth, Elijah would return to prepare the way and act as his herald (Malachi 4:5). John was the herald of the King of Kings.
- But then He calls John less important than the least important person in the kingdom. Why? It was because John marked a dividing line in history. Since John's proclamation had been made, Jesus had come; eternity had entered time; heaven had invaded earth; God had arrived in Jesus; life could never be the same again. We date all time as before Christ and after Christ--B.C. and A.D. Jesus is the dividing line. So, all who come after Him and who receive Him are given a greater blessing than all who went before. The entry of Jesus into the world divided all time into two; and it divided all life in two. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Luke 7:29-30 All the people who heard this, including the tax collectors, acknowledged the justice of God, for they had been baptized with John's baptism. **(30) But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's plan for themselves by refusing to be baptized by him.**

- Let's talk about the statement here – "the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's plan for themselves". Did you know that God has a plan for you? It starts with your acceptance of Jesus as your Savior, believing in what God has said. And then that plan continues as you grow in Him, learning more about Him and watching Him work in your life. But, you can reject that plan. You have been given the freedom by your creator to do so.

- The tremendous truth of Christianity is that God does not force us to do anything, but He coerces us with love. He woos us. But in doing that God takes the chance that people will refuse Him. Many of us have experienced the kind of sorrow God must feel when that happens, when a loved one chooses the wrong way and we're left to see what might have been, what could have been and what was meant to have been. That is life's greatest heartbreak.
- As G. K. Chesterton said, *"God had written not so much a poem, but rather a play; a play he had planned as perfect, but which had necessarily been left to human actors and stage managers, who had since made a great mess of it."* God save us from making a mess of our lives and bringing heartbreak to Him by using our choices to frustrate His purposes.

Luke 7:31-35 *"To what can I compare the people of this generation? (32) They are like little children who sit in the marketplace and shout to each other, 'A wedding song we played for you, the dance you did but scorn. A woeful dirge we chanted, too, but then you did not mourn.' (33) For John the Baptist has come neither eating bread nor drinking wine, yet you say, 'He has a demon!' (34) The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' (35) Absolved from every act of sin, is wisdom by her kith and kin."*

- The fact that "they" called Jesus a glutton and a drunk does not mean at all that He was either one, any more than John the Baptist was demon-possessed. He was "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 7:34), because He had come "to seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10).
- What is Jesus talking about here? The stubbornness of people. We all know the days when a child will grin at anything, and the times that they refuse to obey no matter what you tell them. We also know the moods we can be in when nothing will please us. The human heart can be lost in a rebelliousness where we just won't respond to any call God may make to us. Some people just won't listen no matter what you do.
- But there are the few who answer; and God's wisdom in the end will be justified by those who are His children. People may misuse their freedom of choice to frustrate God's purposes; people in their stubbornness may be blind and deaf to all his appeals. Had God chosen to force us to act the way He wanted us to, it would have been a world without trouble, but it would have been a world of robots and no joy, love, or freedom. But God chose the dangerous way of love, and love in the end will triumph.

Luke 7:36-39 *Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to eat with him. So he went to the Pharisee's home and took his place at the table. (37) There was a woman who was a notorious sinner in that city. When she learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's home, she took an alabaster jar of perfume (38) and knelt at his feet behind him. She was crying and began to wash his feet with her tears and dry them with her hair. Then she kissed his feet over and over again, anointing them constantly with the perfume. (39) Now the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw this and said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who is touching him and what kind of woman she is. She's a sinner!"*

- This took place in the courtyard of the house of Simon the Pharisee. The houses of well-to-do people were built round an open courtyard in the shape of a hollow square. Usually in the courtyard there would be a garden and a fountain; and there in the warm weather meals were eaten. It was the custom

that when a Rabbi was at a meal in such a house, all kinds of people came in--they were allowed to do that--to listen to the wisdom which he spoke. That explains the presence of the woman, and there were probably other people there, too, that had come in to listen to what this great teacher would say.

- When a guest entered a house like this three things were always done. The host placed his hand on the guest's shoulder and gave him the kiss of peace. That was a mark of respect. The roads were only dust tracks, and shoes were just sandals with straps across the foot. So they always poured cool water over the guest's feet to cleanse and comfort them. There would usually be a drop of sweet-smelling oil or perfume of roses put on the guest's head. These things were just good manners, and apparently in this case not one of them was done for Jesus.
- In the east the guests did not sit, but reclined, at a table. They lay on low couches, resting on the left elbow, leaving the right arm free, with the feet stretched out behind; and during the meal the sandals were taken off. That explains how the woman could easily be beside Jesus' feet.
- Simon was a Pharisee, one of the separated ones. Why would a man like this invite Jesus to his house at all? There are three possible reasons:
 - It is possible that he was an admirer and a sympathizer, because not all the Pharisees were Jesus' enemies (Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are other examples). But the whole atmosphere of disrespect makes that hard to believe.
 - It could be that Simon had invited Jesus to try to entice him into saying or doing something which might be used against Him. But this isn't likely either, because in verse 40 Simon gives Jesus the title Rabbi.
 - Most likely, Simon, like some people today, just liked to hang out with celebrities. That would best explain the strange combination of a certain respect along with the snub of not observing the usual courtesies. Simon was a man who tried to patronize Jesus.
- The woman probably had been a prostitute, and many have assumed it was Mary Magdalene. This is unlikely, though, because Luke does not name her here, but clearly names her just a few verses later on (Luke 8:2), and Mary apparently was a wealthy woman (Luke 8:3).

Luke 7:40-43 Jesus said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Teacher," he replied, "say it." (41) "Two men were in debt to a moneylender. One owed him 500 denarii, and the other fifty. (42) When they couldn't pay it back, he generously canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him the most?" (43) Simon answered, "I suppose the one who had the larger debt canceled." Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly."

- A denarii was a Roman silver coin worth about a day's wages for an average laborer.
- What point is Jesus making here?

Luke 7:44-46 Then, turning to the woman, he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You didn't give me any water for my feet, but this woman has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. (45) You didn't give me a kiss, but this woman, from the moment I came in, has not stopped kissing my feet. (46) You didn't anoint my head with oil, but this woman has anointed my feet with perfume.

- Around her neck she wore, like most Jewish women, a little vial of concentrated perfume; they were called alabasters; and they were very expensive. She wanted to pour it on his feet, because it was all she had to offer. But as she saw him she began to weep and her tears fell on His feet. For a Jewish woman to appear with hair down was very immodest. On her wedding day a girl put up her hair and she would never appear in public with it down again. The fact that this woman let her long hair down in public showed how she had forgotten everyone except Jesus.

Luke 7:47-50 **So I'm telling you that her sins, as many as they are, have been forgiven, and that's why she has shown such great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven loves little." (48) Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven!" (49) Those who were at the table with them began to say among themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" (50) But Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."**

- Discuss Jesus' statement, "The one to whom little is forgiven loves little". Does that mean we should sin more so that God will forgive us of more, and then we would be able to love more?
- Whoever this woman was, she had somewhere met Jesus, had turned to Him in faith (verse 50), and He had forgiven her sins (verse 48). In gratitude and love, she boldly went in to the Pharisee's home to thank Him in the best way she could think of, and the Lord accepted it. "Tear bottles" have been found among the artifacts from ancient Israel, in which their owners would collect and keep their tears. This woman had apparently spent many nights weeping over her sins and seemingly hopeless life, and had collected enough tears to actually bathe the feet of Jesus in gratitude for forgiveness and salvation. What a picture!
- There's an important contrast here in this story, two different attitudes of mind and heart. Simon thought he didn't need anything or anybody, so he didn't feel love, and did not receive forgiveness. Simon's impression of himself was that he was a good man in the sight of men and of God.
- The woman knew that she was a sinner, that she needed forgiveness, and she was overwhelmed with love for the One who could provide it, and so she received forgiveness.
- The one thing which shuts a man off from God every time is self-sufficiency. And the strange thing is that the better a man is the more he feels his sin. The apostle Paul, one of the most godly men that ever lived, said this in 1 Timothy 1:15:

1 Timothy 1:15 **This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" — and I am the worst of them!**

- It is a true saying to say that the greatest of sins is to be conscious of no sin; but realizing our sin and our need will open the door to the forgiveness of God. And if there's anything that will make us realize our need, it is the last chapter – the Sermon on the Mount.