



The Gospel of Luke - Chapter Seven

IV. Luke 4:16-9:50 - The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee (continues)

Summary of Chapter Seven

In Capernaum an army officer's servant is seriously ill. The officer heard about Jesus and sent some Jewish friends to ask him to come to heal his servant. This centurion loved Galilee and its people; he had a record of helping the Jews whenever he could.

Jesus turned aside to go to his house but the centurion asked that he not come into the house because he, the centurion, was unworthy and he did not come to Jesus himself for that same reason. He knew that Jesus only had to speak the word and his servant would be healed and so it was. But Jesus spoke of his amazement at the man's faith in comparison to that of the Jews.

On arrival in the outskirts of Nain, a crowd appeared carrying the bier with the body of a widow's only son. Jesus felt sorrow for the women and raised her son back to life simply by touching the bier. The people were understandably amazed and fame of this spread quickly around the whole region. The people held Jesus to be a great prophet and praised God.

John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he was the one they were waiting for or should they expect another. Jesus pointed to his teaching, healing and raising of the dead, and told them to report back to John what they had seen and heard. After they left, Jesus showed great respect for John by saying that there was no-one greater than he on earth but that in the Kingdom of God, even the least was greater than John. The Pharisees and scribes continued to disbelieve in Jesus and were determined to discredit him.

A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus for a meal. While in his house, a sinful woman brought some expensive perfume and she began washing Jesus' feet and drying them with her hair. Simon exclaimed that if Jesus were a real prophet he would know what kind of woman she was. Jesus replied that Simon had failed to follow the normal hospitable requirements of providing water for guests to wash their feet, and indicated he was wrong to consider himself more worthy than the woman. The woman had much to be forgiven and, as a sinner of such standing, would be forgiven much. Simon, who considered himself better than her, would not be forgiven for as much although he needed forgiveness in just the same way. Jesus forgave the woman and sent her on her way. This again caused much concern, as the people knew that only God could forgive sins.

IV.d [Luke 7:1-50 - Who is this Jesus?](#)

Luke helps his readers answer the question 'Who is Jesus?' (v.49) by recounting two healing miracles in vv.1-10 and vv.11-17, John's testimony to Jesus in vv.18-35, and another example of Jesus forgiving sins in vv.36-50.

IV.d.i [Luke 7:1-10 - The faith of the centurion](#)

This account is also recorded in Matthew 8:5-13 but John 4:46-53 is almost certainly a different incident.

¹ When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.

[Luke 7:1](#)

[Capernaum](#) was not just Jesus main operational base in Galilee, it was also the scene of some of his most remarkable works: <<And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day>> ([Matthew 11:23](#)).

² There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.

[Luke 7:2](#)

[A centurion](#) was a Roman officer in charge of a hundred men.

³ The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.

[Luke 7:3](#)

[Elders of the Jews](#) were local Jewish officials. The villages of Galilee had their own elders who presided as local judges ([Apocrypha, Judith 6:14-16](#)).

⁴ When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵ because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.

[Luke 7:4-5](#)

The Jewish officials were saying in effect 'He is a kind man who loves our people and helped build our synagogue. Please help him'. Palestine had a very poor reputation with Roman officials and there were probably very few who liked being there, let alone showed such desire to be part of the community. He probably also recognised the value of having them offer up prayers for him to God in the way the Persian King Darius did: <<so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons>> ([Ezra 6:10](#)).

The [synagogue](#) in Capernaum is the same as the one mentioned in [Luke 4:33](#).

⁶ So 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. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.

Luke 7:6-7

I do not deserve or I am not worthy reveals the centurion's humility, which is very revealing as both the Roman authorities and the Jewish leaders held him in such high regard. Many men in his position would not be as humble, at least not so publicly.

Say the word reveals his great faith.

⁸ For 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.

Luke 7:8

The centurion responds in effect 'I too can do things because of the authority given me so how much more can you!'

⁹ When 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.

Luke 7:9

Not found; even in Israel foreshadows the entry of Gentiles into the Kingdom of God. Of course, Jesus was also his God as Paul remarks: <<Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too>> (Romans 3:29).

Such great faith. Jesus commends the centurion, who is a Gentile, for his humble faith (v.6). This is one of the few places where Jesus commends the way in which someone approaches him. The centurion did not think himself worthy to visit Jesus; yet Jesus thought the centurion worthy to visit him; for <<whoever humbles himself will be exalted>> (Matthew 23:12b).

¹⁰ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

Luke 7:10

Found the servant well. As in all healing miracles in scripture, the proof of the miracle is described.

IV.d.ii Luke 7:11-17 - Jesus raises a widow's son

Jesus' power to heal is now demonstrated by a greater miracle: raising the dead. Other biblical examples of miraculous resurrections, where resuscitation is not an option because of the length of time elapsed since death, are: Jairus' daughter, brought back by Jesus (Luke 8:40-56), as was Lazarus (John 11:1-44). In Acts 9:36-43, God works through Peter to raise Tabatha, also called Dorcas. The miracle here in Luke Chapter 7, involves a widow's son, recalling the similar miracle of a Gentile widow's son by Elijah in 1 Kings 17:17-24.

¹¹ Soon afterwards, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him.

Luke 7:11

Nain is commonly identified with the modern village Nein, southeast of Nazareth although other locations have also been suggested.

¹² As 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.

Luke 7:12

The only son of his mother, a widow reveals the desperate economic situation of the woman. With no husband she would have relied on her son to provide for her. Here we have two crowds, one following Jesus; the other attending the funeral, converging on the busiest part of the town - its gates. This ensures maximum exposure for this miracle in a town that Jesus may not have visited before.

The large crowd were there to mourn, which is perhaps a forerunner to the fulfilment of this prophecy: <<And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son>> (Zechariah 12:10).

¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, Don't cry.

Luke 7:13

Don't cry indicates that Jesus will do something. Although not intended as a sign but as an act of compassion for his heart went out to her. This miracle will, nevertheless, provide evidence for answering the question, 'Who is this?' in v.49.

¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, Young man, I say to you, get up!

Luke 7:14

Jesus touched the coffin, a simple plank that served as an open coffin used to carry the dead body outside the city to its burial place. Jesus is unconcerned about ceremonial uncleanness even though it says in the law: <<Whoever touches the dead body of anyone will be unclean for seven days>> (Numbers 19:11), and: <<Anyone out in the open who touches someone who has been killed with a sword or someone who has died a natural death, or anyone who touches a human bone or a grave, will be unclean for seven days>> (Numbers 19:16). For Jesus is not made unclean when he touches the dead; instead, the dead man comes to life.

The dead are always taken away from habitation for purposes of ceremonial cleanliness. Consider the case of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, who died at the hands of the Lord for offering 'unauthorised fire' at the altar: <<So they came and carried them, still in their tunics, outside the camp, as Moses ordered>> (Leviticus 10:5).

¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

Luke 7:15

Sat up and began to talk is proof of the miracle, as confirmed in v.10, when the men found the servant well. What Jesus did is perhaps described in the words of Job 33:24 <<to be gracious to him and say, 'Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him'>>. Ultimately, Jesus would be a ransom for all mankind.

Gave him back to his mother. These are the exact words found in the Septuagint of 1 Kings 17:23, describing the raising of a widow's son by Elijah.

¹⁶ They were all filled with awe and praised God. A great prophet has appeared among us, they said. God has come to help his people.

Luke 7:16

In recognition of God's powerful presence, the people's awe immediately leads to worship: they praised God, which is similar to the shepherd's reaction after the birth of Jesus: <<The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told>> (Luke 2:20).

A great prophet is a correct description of Jesus, see Luke 4:23-24, 7:39, 9:8, 9:19, 13:33, and 24:19; but it is an inadequate one, unless one adds: Christ, Son of God, Son of Man, Lord, etc.

God has come to help his people. God is making known his presence in Jesus, bringing salvation to the Jewish people, who had waited so long for him. This was also Zechariah's response: <<Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people>> (Luke 1:68). But Jesus prophesied that people will fail to know the coming of God among them, which will result in the destruction of the temple: <<They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognise the time of God's coming to you>> (Luke 19:44), and God visiting the Gentiles: <<Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself>> (Acts 15:14).

¹⁷ This news about Jesus spread throughout Judæa and the surrounding country.

Luke 7:17

There is an old proverb that says 'good news travels fast'. This will also be seen in the Book of Acts, where the Gospel starts to spread right across the Roman Empire.

IV.d.iii Luke 7:18-35 - Jesus and John the Baptist

Luke records John's question to Jesus (vv.18-23), Jesus' testimony to John (vv.24-30), and the judgment on Israel for rejecting both John and Jesus (vv.31-35). This account is mirrored in Matthew 11:2-19.

¹⁸ John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them,

Luke 7:18

All these things refers to the mighty miracles Jesus has been doing, as well as to his remarkable teaching.

¹⁹ he sent them to the Lord to ask, Are you the one who was 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 was to come, or should we expect someone else?'

Luke 7:19-20

The one who was to come. John's question may indicate his doubt as to whether Jesus was the 'mightier one', who would <<baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire>> (Luke 3:16b). For some reason, Jesus did not seem to be exactly the kind of Messiah John was expecting, perhaps because it did not appear that Jesus was going to overthrow the Roman rulers and probably also because Jesus was not immediately bringing judgment on evildoers. John's concern was probably aggravated by being in prison.

It may have been more for the benefit of his disciples than for himself that John sent them, as elsewhere John had no doubts about Jesus being the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

²¹ At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind.

Luke 7:21

Luke prefaces Jesus' response to John with a summary of his ministry of healing, confirmed in Luke 4:40-41, 5:15 and 6:18-19. Luke mentions separately the restoring of sight to the blind, possibly to emphasise the greatness of such a miracle.

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 cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.

Luke 7:22

Report to John. Jesus does not answer John's question directly but gives evidence demonstrating he is <<the one who was to come>> (v.19). From the following report, John can come to his own conclusion and instruct his own disciples accordingly.

The blind receive sight is confirmed in Luke 4:18, Luke 18:35-43, and John Chapter 9.

For the lame walk, see Luke 5:17-25.

Those who have leprosy are cured is confirmed in Luke 5:12-16 and 17:11-19.

The deaf hear is confirmed in Isaiah 29:18, 35:5 and 42:18.

For the dead are raised, see vv.11-17, Luke 8:40-56, John Chapter 11 and Acts 9:36-43.

Good news preached to the poor is confirmed in Luke 4:18, 6:20, 14:13 and 14:21. In other words, Jesus is indeed the long awaited Messiah as promised in the OT. The days of salvation, foretold by Isaiah, have begun even though they will not be consummated until Christ returns to establish the eternal kingdom.

All of this verse is supported by Matthew 11:5 <<The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor>>

²³ Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me.

Luke 7:23

Jesus' exhortation blessed is the man who does not fall away is surely directed to John and his disciples.

²⁴ After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: What did you go out into the desert 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'.

Luke 7:24-27

Reed swayed by the wind suggests something flimsy and uncertain, far from an accurate description of John the Baptist, as we read: <<John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey>> (Mark 1:6). John was not one to be swayed by human opinion; he would not bow down to the likes of Herod or to other influences of the world. He was a man who remained true to his calling.

John was more than a prophet, he was the prophet sent to fulfil Malachi 3:1 <<"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty>>.

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.

Luke 7:28

Those born of women is a Jewish idiom for ordinary human birth, as confirmed in Job 14:1, 15:14 and 25:4. Jesus implicitly contrasts this with the new birth into the Kingdom of God.

No-one greater. John's greatness among all the OT prophets, all those who came before the arrival of the Kingdom of God, comes from his function as direct forerunner of Jesus, the Messiah. But John was not part of the Kingdom of God that Jesus was proclaiming and bringing to reality; for he was still part of the old covenant system.

Therefore, the one who is least in the Kingdom of God, i.e. one who has believed in Jesus and has become a member of the new covenant kingdom, is actually greater than John. For those who come after John live in the age of fulfilment following the coming of Jesus. This underscores the qualitative difference between the old age and the dawning of the new kingdom age.

John's mission was uniquely privileged because he prepared the way for the Messiah and the kingdom. But those in the Kingdom of God have the greater privilege because they have actually entered the kingdom in its new covenant reality and become partakers in the new covenant through the blood of Christ. On the salvation of believers in the OT, see Romans Chapter Four.

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

Luke 7:29-30

Jesus' hearers rightly take his words in vv.24-28 as a commendation of John, not a criticism. God was working through John for his purposes, in his time. Therefore, those who had been baptised by John were glad and they acknowledged that God's way was right.

³¹ To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? ³² They are like children sitting in the market-place and calling out to each other:

'We played the flute for you,
and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
and you did not cry'.

Luke 7:31-32

This generation does not refer to everyone then living, but to the leaders and others who rejected both John the Baptist and Jesus, and who were still the dominant force in the culture. In their rejection of both the ascetic John, who was a person who dedicated his life to the pursuit of contemplative ideals and practiced extreme self-denial or self-mortification for his beliefs; and the non-ascetic Jesus. They, this generation, were like children refusing to play either a sad or happy game. This is a theme used throughout Luke's Gospel.

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'.

Luke 7:33-34

Here we have two very different men. John the Baptist, although born into the priesthood and entitled to the authority and trappings as such, led the life that was obedient to his calling through the Spirit and people thought he was crazy because he wasn't like other men. Jesus, the Son of Man, appeared to be of lowly status but lived more freely. It was a life that allowed

him to mix freely with Pharisees, tax collectors, the disadvantaged and all the sectors of society equally, all of them sinners, so that his message could be as widely proclaimed as possible. This resulted in him too being the subject of personal abuse, i.e. a glutton and a drunkard.

³⁵ But wisdom is proved right by all her children.

Luke 7:35

Wisdom, i.e. God's way (v.29), is proved right, i.e. shown to be right by all her children, that is, the followers of John and Jesus.

IV.d.iv Luke 7:36-50 - Jesus anointed by a sinful woman

This is the culmination of vv.1-35 and answers the question 'Who is this?' (v.49). This, and the similar accounts in Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9, and John 12:1-8, probably refer to two separate incidents.

The woman is named in Matthew and John as Mary the sister of Martha. Although unnamed in Mark, that is probably the same event. But here in Luke the scenario and outcomes are very different and, in fact, bear little resemblance other than in the way the women viewed Jesus so clearly as their Lord.

³⁶ Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

Luke 7:36

Pharisees were discussed at length in Luke 5:17, as was the tradition of reclining at tables.

³⁷ When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, ³⁸ and 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.

Luke 7:37-38

A woman is unnamed but is certainly not Martha's sister Mary. Some commentators believe it to be Mary Magdalene but there is no supporting evidence for this.

Alabaster is a soft stone frequently used as a perfume container.

With her tears she washed Jesus' feet, which was an act of hospitality omitted by Simon (see v.44), and wiped them with her hair. Her tears are tears both of thankfulness and also of reverent awe, as she senses the presence of God in the person of Jesus. Her act would have been considered improper; therefore, it took great courage to honour Jesus in this way.

Her kisses, like her tears, were for the joy of being in the presence of her Lord. They are not the kisses of a would-be spouse: <<Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth>> (Song 1:2a), but a genuine sign of love and affection given by one who had received the message of grace and had been eternally freed from a life of sin.

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.

Luke 7:39-40

If this man were a prophet. The Pharisee charges that Jesus is not a prophet, a clear contrast to v.16, where the crowd proclaimed a great prophet of God was among them, because a true prophet would not allow a sinful woman to touch him. Simon was probably thinking along these lines: <<Keep away; don't come near me, for I am too sacred for you!>> (Isaiah 65:5), and expected Jesus to respond in a similar fashion.

Said to himself, Jesus answered him. Jesus knows Simon's thoughts showing that he is indeed a providential prophet.

⁴¹ Two men owed money to a certain money-lender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

Luke 7:41

Five hundred denarii was equivalent to a labourer's pay for 20 months. Therefore fifty denarii was worth about two months' wages.

⁴² Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?

Luke 7:42

Cancelled the debts. The analogy of sin with debt is confirmed in the Lord's Prayer: <<Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation>> (Luke 11:4), whereas Matthew 6:12 uses the word debt. Refer to 'The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant' in Matthew 18:21-35 for a further example.

⁴³ Simon replied, I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled. You have judged correctly, Jesus said.

⁴⁴ Then he turned towards 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. ⁴⁵ You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

Luke 7:43-46

Simon's answer the one who had the bigger debt leads to the comparison of Simon's lack of hospitality: no water for my feet, no kiss, did not put oil on my head, as confirmed by David, who acknowledges the hospitality of God: <<You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows>> (Psalm 23:5), and: <<Let a

righteous man strike me – it is a kindness; let him rebuke me – it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it>> (Psalm 141:5), with the greater love of the woman who washed his feet with her tears, continually kissing his feet and anointing them with expensive ointment.

⁴⁷ Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little.

Luke 7:47

For she loved much refers not to the cause of the woman's forgiveness but the result of it, as confirmed in the note on v.50, and also: <<which of them will love him more>> v.42.

⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to her, Your sins are forgiven.

⁴⁹ The other guests began to say among themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins?

Luke 7:48-49

Your sins are forgiven. As in Luke 5:20-25, where some men lowered their crippled friend down through the roof, Jesus' statement is understood as exercising the divine prerogative of forgiving sins and is followed by a similar question: Who is this who even forgives sins? Luke intentionally raises the question for his readers to reflect on the significance and implications of who Jesus is.

⁵⁰ Jesus said to the woman, your faith has saved you; go in peace.

Luke 7:50

Your faith has saved you. As shown in the story of the woman with long-term menstrual bleeding: <<Then he said to her, Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace>> (Luke 8:48), the Samaritan healed of leprosy: <<Then he said to him, Rise and go; your faith has made you well>> (Luke 17:19), and the blind beggar who received his sight: <<Jesus said to him, Receive your sight; your faith has healed you>> (Luke 18:42).

The woman experienced the forgiveness of her sins, not because of love as we saw in v.47, but through faith which was evidenced in the way she honoured Jesus in her act of washing his feet.