



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,  
day after day, and that the people of God  
were filled with joy!

## Friday – Read Luke 7: 18-23 – Look and see what is happening!

V21. When John's two disciples come to ask Jesus if he is the Messiah or not, Jesus is engrossed in healing large numbers of people. It is as though the very thing that John is concerned about, grace and healing - not judgement, is being dramatically enacted as they arrive. In reality, though, what is happening is providing the answer to John's questions. For it is giving Jesus the context to direct John back into the Old Testament, to a reference adapted from Isaiah 35:5,6, which speaks of the work of the Messiah in showing mercy, and then to Isaiah 61:1 where the Messiah is presented as preaching the good news to the poor. Jesus is saying to John, the messenger of the coming Messiah, through the two messengers John has sent - 'Look at what I am doing. See, in my preaching and healing, the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies about me.' The omission of judgement is not a statement declaring the rejection of judgement; the judgement will come, but in God's time.

V23. Note the gentle warning at the end of Jesus' words to John. It is a beatitude, a blessing, but unlike the beatitudes we saw in chapter 6, or that are in Matthew 5:2-12, this beatitude has a negative explanation. "Blessed is the one who is not offended" or literally 'trapped against me'. In other words, 'John, look and see, and then take care to trust in what is happening rather than question it because of what is not happening.'

Sometimes in the church when it is self-evident that good things are happening, people still want to make a case for what is not happening. Now, of course, we always need to be vigilant for what is publicly wrong in our midst, but the one who has an eye only for what is missing, and constantly seems oblivious to the grace and healing work of Christ in his Bride, needs to take care. The fact that such questioning may present itself with an air of piousness, and comes across as only wanting the best for the church, should not cloud the fact that it shows an attitude of heart that is in general discontent with God's work and His ways. Such people need to be warned that they are in danger of being trapped in rejecting Christ, and that is not a good place to be.

## Thursday – Read Luke 7: 18-23 – Are you really the Messiah?

V18. It's not clear when these events concerning John the Baptist take place. While in prison, he's been hearing regular updates about what Jesus is doing. This has caused him some concern. Why? Probably because he'd been expecting to hear news that Jesus was taking steps to establish his kingdom and that wasn't happening. So, he sends two of his disciples, something which shows how serious this is for John, to ask Jesus two questions. The first question, "Are you the one who is to come?" has its roots in the Old Testament – Psalms 70:7 and 118:27. It was a term John had used in Luke 3:16, when, as he understood, he was 'preparing the way' for the coming Messiah. Which of course he was; but he expected Jesus, like all the other Jews, to fulfil his role in a different way. The second question implies that if Jesus is not the Messiah, then he should let the people know, so that they can start looking for the person who is.

So how did John expect Jesus to fulfil his role? John expected Jesus to preach judgement, and so was perplexed when he heard that Jesus was preaching grace, and healing people. Of course, he knew that was necessary, but there was no swinging of the axe. No cutting down and throwing into the fire of those trees which were not bearing good fruit (Matthew 3:10-12). John had preached that the one coming after him would bring judgement. Hence, the command 'repent and believe for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'. The absence of judgement in Jesus' ministry is now leaving him baffled.

It is the same with all prophesy – the issue is one of 'time'. The Old Testament prophets, John himself, the prophecies of Jesus and the New Testament, while they are all clear about what will happen, they are silent on the timing. Grace and judgement are stated, but the matter of their respective timing is solely in the hands of God; and He has chosen, in His infinite wisdom, not to reveal it. Why not? So that we will live by faith. 'Sight' wants to know the time, so that it can make decisions on how and when to prepare. 'Faith', on the other hand, requires us to strive to live in a constant state of increasing preparedness. It is the absence of knowing the 'when' that keeps us looking to Christ. Because we do not know what a day may bring forth, we have to engage with God and run the race daily with perseverance. The gift of not knowing 'when' is the best gift we could have. For it means that we, as believers in Christ, have to be continuously living by faith, in that place of reliance upon God, where blessing will flow. Constantly wanting to know when God is going to sort the problem in your life is not good. Don't yearn for it to be different; God knows exactly what is going on in your life and what is best for you. If you did know, you would act to sort the problem yourself; and that would be to your detriment. Trust God and live by faith.

## Monday – Read Luke 7:1-5 – A good reputation.

V2. *The Centurion.* Historical accounts show that Centurions were Roman soldiers, well-balanced, mature, serious, competent individuals who had command of a hundred men. The New Testament always speaks highly of their character (Luke 23:37, Acts 10:22; 22:26; 23:17,23; 24:23; 27:1,43). This man is no exception. We can see that he is a gentile, a god-fearing man, possibly a proselyte of the Jewish faith given the reputation he has with the Jewish elders. Probably a Roman, seconded to serve with Herod Antipas's forces, because, in peacetime, Capernaum wouldn't have had any Roman soldiers stationed there.

V2. *The Servant.* Luke tells us that the servant is highly valued. Men of genuine leadership ability quickly develop a collaborative approach with others of ability, because they understand that it's not about proving their ability, but about working together to get the most done. So, this servant, although at a different tier on the social stratum, was evidently a competent and essential member of this Centurion's 'work-life' family, someone who would definitely be missed.

V2. *The Sickness.* Matthew tells us that an illness had paralyzed the man and that he was in immense suffering (Matthew 8:5-13). Luke interestingly doesn't mention the actual disease but cuts to the key point; the man is dying, and the Centurion acts. Sometimes in life, we just need to stop talking and act.

It is interesting how the Centurion gets Jesus involved. He obviously knew of Jesus but sends a delegation to speak with him. Not because he thinks he is superior, but because he views himself as unworthy of being in Jesus' company. Here is a man who, because of his profession and rank, could have expected Jesus to come to him. It is a measure of his honest humility that this encounter develops as it does. Men of real character do not need to parade their ability and status; they behave with humility and make wise decisions.

V3-5. *The intermediaries.* These men are Jewish elders from the local synagogue, who not only go and speak with Jesus on the Centurion's behalf, but they do so earnestly. That's remarkable. Luke tells us why these Jews intervene on behalf of this Roman Centurion. It is because this Centurion loves the Jews in Capernaum, and has shown it in a variety of ways, including investing in the building of the town synagogue. With the result that these Jewish Elders cared for both him and his servant. This is clear from both the level of engagement and the nature of the interaction they had with Jesus. Their words to Jesus say it all; having presented the specific request they add, "He is worthy to have you do this for him." That's a high commendation.

Godly men and godly women develop good reputations with others. And while some may speak well of you, because of your honesty and integrity, many will. Work hard to keep a good reputation with all; it is hard-gained and can be easily lost.

## Tuesday – Read Luke 7:6-10 – A man who looked at Jesus!

V6 How does Jesus respond to the request to heal the Centurion's dying servant? Jesus goes with the Jewish synagogue elders to the Centurion's home. But as he is doing so the Centurion sends his friends to stop him. Why? Has he changed his mind? No, Luke tells us that it is because the Centurion doesn't see himself as being worthy of having Jesus in his home. There is also the issue of Jesus being exposed to the uncleanness of a gentile home, which is no small thing, especially for a Jewish rabbi. So, the Centurion's thinking is wholly centered around Jesus. A man of genuine humility. How does the Centurion think Jesus is going to heal his servant if Jesus is not going to get to see and touch him? Well, he obviously expects Jesus to do so from where he is and by simply speaking. How did he reach such a conclusion about Jesus' ability? Well, it didn't just come through hearing about Jesus. As he has gone about his life in Capernaum, the Centurion has observed Jesus, and has given some serious thought to who Jesus is. As a result, he has come to an understanding of the authority and power behind Jesus' captivating teaching and breathtaking miracles. It's this thoughtful analysis that has led the Centurion to understand who Jesus is, and conclude that all that Jesus has to do is say the word, and it will be done. What is convicting, though, is not just the fact that this man took the time and applied himself to understanding who Jesus is; it's his belief that Jesus can exercise his authority and power in an apparently impossible way. Except for a few isolated incidents, involving the Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha, 1 Kings 17:17-24, 2 Kings 4:31-37 and 2 Kings 13:20-21, this type of authority and power had never been seen in the world before. So, this man is not only grasping something that Jesus' disciples are not getting; he is then making belief-based requests upon it. He is thinking and believing far beyond the normal because of his grasp of who Jesus is. This is a measure of belief in Jesus' spoken word that many Christians would struggle to lay hold of today.

V9. There are only two occasions when Jesus marvelled at people. Here, and in Mark 6:6, when he marvelled at the unbelief of the people in his hometown of Nazareth. There are only two times in the New Testament where Jesus praises the faith of a person. This is one, and in Matthew 15:21-28 when he sees the faith of the Canaanite woman. In his marvelling, what is the next thing Jesus does? Picture the scene. Jesus is on his way to the town's Roman centurion and on hearing what the Centurion's friends have to say, he turns round to the crowd and says, "I tell you," - in other words, listen – "not even in Israel have I found such faith." Jesus is not saying that he has found no faith in Israel, it is the degree of faith found that he is commenting on.

So, what does Jesus say to heal the man? We are not told. Luke simply tells us that the Centurion's friends got back to his home and found that the servant was well. He had been healed.

## Wednesday – Read Luke 7: 11-17 – The supernatural power of Jesus.

V11. Only Luke has this account of what took place in Nain, a town about a day's journey southwest of Capernaum, on the slopes of Little Hermon. Great crowds are following Jesus, and as they approach the town they are met by a funeral cortège of a young man. This particular death is all the more harrowing because the young man's mother is already a widow, and he was an only child. A fact underscored by the presence of a large number of people from Nain at the funeral. For the mother there is both the obvious tremendous grief and the implications for her future protection and provision.

V13. This is the first time that Luke names Jesus as 'Lord', a designation that speaks of Christ's authority and power. When the two crowds meet, Jesus sees the woman, as she walks alone being followed by a large crowd. Even though his life is busy, full of people, overwhelmed with demands, he is alive to the world around him. Is that not a challenge to ourselves? How often do we see and respond to those in need in our sightline or are we just too engrossed in our own affairs to even register presence?

V13,14. Filled with compassion, pity, and genuine concern for this woman, Jesus moves towards her and then speaks to the woman. Jesus' comforting words of 'do not weep' have sometimes been crassly misinterpreted as though he is telling her just to 'stop crying'. That's not the case, the Lord speaks tenderly to this woman to gain her attention, and then moves instantly to touch the bier, causing the pallbearers to stop. This touching of the bier is deeply significant. It wasn't done simply to get the men to stop. Jesus knew that in doing so he was polluting himself under the ceremonial laws. But this act communicates identification with the cause of the woman's grief. To this point Jesus' actions would have been seen as normal, even if they were slightly unusual for a Rabbi. What he does next though is totally abnormal. He speaks to the corpse. He tells the dead person, the young man, to rise. No drama, just words. But what words! Instantly the young man sits up, and he begins to speak. In the last act of this encounter Jesus presents the young man to his mother – the power of Jesus' spoken word accompanied by the compassion of his actions.

V16. Fear, awe, wonderment, gripped those in the funeral procession and those following Jesus. The crowds cannot envisage anyone being higher than a great prophet, so they are giving Jesus the highest accolade they know, even though it falls far short of who he is, the Messiah. Nonetheless, the word spread far and wide of what had happened. The story of Jesus' raising the dead son of this widow in Nain becomes known throughout Palestine. Jesus was now a nationally known figure. Within several years he would become internationally known, and within a few decades globally so, and at a time when word of mouth was the sole means of communication.

Do you believe in the power of the Word of God in your life?