

# Who Is This Jesus?

Luke 7:1 After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.

<sup>2</sup> Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him.

<sup>3</sup> When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.

<sup>4</sup> And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him,

<sup>5</sup> for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue."

<sup>6</sup> And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore I did not presume to come to you.

**But say the word, and let my servant be healed.**

<sup>8</sup> For I too am a man set under authority, with 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."

<sup>9</sup> When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."

<sup>10</sup> And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

<sup>11</sup> Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him.

<sup>12</sup> As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her.

<sup>13</sup> And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

<sup>14</sup> Then he came up and touched the bier,

and the bearers stood still. **And he said**, "Young man, **I say to you**, arise."

<sup>15</sup> And **the dead man** sat up and began to speak, and Jesus **gave him to his mother**.

<sup>16</sup> Fear seized **them all**, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"

<sup>17</sup> And this report about him spread through **the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country**.

<sup>18</sup> The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And **John**,

<sup>19</sup> calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we **look for another?**"

<sup>20</sup> And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we **look for another?**'"

<sup>21</sup> **In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.**

<sup>22</sup> And he answered them, "Go and **tell John what you have seen and heard**: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.

<sup>23</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

<sup>24</sup> When **John's messengers had gone**, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did **you** go out into the wilderness to see? **A reed shaken by the wind?**

<sup>25</sup> What then did **you** go out to see? **A man dressed in soft clothing?** Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts.

<sup>26</sup> What then did you go out to see? **A prophet?** Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

<sup>27</sup> This is he of whom it is written, "'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'

<sup>28</sup> I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than **John**. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

29 (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they de-  
clared God just, **having been baptized** with the baptism of John,  
30 but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for  
themselves, **not having been baptized by him**.)

31 "To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and  
what are they like?

32 They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one  
another, "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we  
sang a dirge, and you did not weep.'

33 For **John the Baptist** has come eating no bread and drinking no  
wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.'

34 **The Son of Man** has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look  
at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sin-  
ners!'

35 Yet **wisdom** is justified by all **her children**."

36 One of the Pharisees asked him **to eat with him**, and he went **into  
the Pharisee's house** and **reclined at table**.

37 And behold, **a woman** of the city, **who was a sinner**, when she  
learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house,  
brought an alabaster flask of ointment,

38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, **she began to wet his  
feet with her tears** and wiped them with the hair of her head and  
kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

39 Now **when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this**, he said to  
himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and  
what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

40 And **Jesus** answering said to him, "**Simon**, I have **something to say  
to you**." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

41 "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred  
denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup> When they could not pay, **he cancelled  
the debt of both**. Now which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom **he cancelled the  
larger debt**."

And **he said to him**, "You have judged rightly."

44 Then turning toward the woman he said to **Simon**, "**Do you see this  
woman?** I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet,

but **she has wet my feet with her tears** and wiped them with her hair. <sup>45</sup> You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. <sup>46</sup> You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

<sup>47</sup> Therefore I tell you, **her sins, which are many, are forgiven**-- for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." <sup>48</sup> And he said to her, "**Your sins are forgiven.**"

<sup>49</sup> Then those who were **at table with him** began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" <sup>50</sup> And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

(Luke 7:1-50)

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## Deconstructing Jesus

A popular trend on the internet amongst former “Christians” is something called **Deconstruction**.<sup>1</sup> Deconstruction comes from people who have left the Faith or apostatized. It is being spear-headed by former pastors, Christian celebrities, Christian musicians, and is percolating its way down to the unknown Christian who is following in their steps.

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<sup>1</sup> A term people have adopted from the postmodernist philosopher Jacques Derrida whose philosophy, among others of his ilk, has been a driving philosophical force in the emergence of the neo-Marxism and critical race theory that is taking over every sector of civilization like a plague. Thus, it is more likely than not that a person deconstructing Christianity has been influenced, often deeply, by one or more of these philosophies.

It usually starts with **some experience**.<sup>2</sup> “Church-hurt” as they call it. Their priest abused them somehow. They grew up in a strict and legalistic household that held them back from really seeing the truth about the world. They were spiritually manipulated or controlled by people over them. All of this is inexcusable behavior, by the way. Anyone who says it is OK does not know truth.

It then often moves to **something more objective**. They’ve started to see contradictions in the Bible. Manuscripts don’t match up; the Bible is untrustworthy and I’ve been lied to. The church is full of hypocrites. The morality of the Bible is abysmal, compared to what I think it should be (God sends his people to utterly obliterate mommies, babies and kitty cats; a sovereign God isn’t doing anything about suffering, etc.), and so this God is a terrible entity that can’t really exist. Curiously, every one of these has been trafficked heavily throughout church history and they’ve all been dealt with time and again, but for some reason, Deconstructionists act they are the first people to notice them.

This is **not your ordinary quiet leaving either**. They are vociferous in their complaints and they want you and everyone else to know it, no matter who it hurts, which is

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<sup>2</sup> I’m taking a lot of this from a great video presentation on the subject by my good friends over at **Marrow Ministries**, “Deconstruction, Episode 1,” *The Marrow Show* (March 22, 2023), <https://marrowministries.org/deconstruction-episode-1-the-marrow-show>.

ironic, given that we aren't supposed to "hurt" people. This God that supposedly doesn't exist totally consumes their every thought. The Deconstruction movement is growing.

The sad fact of the matter is, **spiritual abuse is real**, in churches and in families, and it is wrong. People *are* hypocritical in churches. The Bible isn't the easiest of books to understand, there are transmission difficulties, and sometimes and even the best prophets wrestled with the problem of evil and suffering. Because of these kinds of things, even the very best of us have doubts. Enter, **John the Baptist**.

We last saw John in Luke's Gospel **baptizing** with a mighty difficult word for most people to hear, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" He gave people the law, told them how they were to behave, and would not back down. He was a hardened, tough individual in terms of not compromising on his convictions. In fact, he was so bold about it that after baptizing the Messiah, his own cousin, and clearly believing that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, he confronted the great ruler of Galilee, Herod the Tetrarch about an affair he was having with his brother's wife, Herodias (**Luke 3:19**). And for it, **Herod locked John up in prison (20)**.

John has been in prison now for a while. He has all the time in the world to sit there and think. And his mind starts

to play tricks on him while he's alone. "I thought Jesus was supposed to be the Messiah? Why isn't he making all things right like the prophets promised? Why am I sitting here in prison when all I did was proclaim God's holy law and tell the truth? I thought he was going to free our nation from Rome?" John was questioning. He was not deconstructing, but he had been living through an experience that not a single one of these Deconstructionists have ever had to live through. It is understandable that in his mind, he was wondering if he had been wrong about it all. Who is this Jesus, really? That's the question before us today. It is a question many are wrestling with. Some are trying to be honest with it; others—not so much. But it is such a monumental question that Luke addresses it through a series of stories that take up the entirety of Luke 7.

## Luke 7:1-50 Context and Structure

**Luke 7** contains five distinct stories making up 50 verses. It comes on the heels of Jesus' great **Sermon on the Plain**. The movement of the chapter takes us from **Capernaum (Luke 7:1)** by the Sea (perhaps just at the bottom of the hill from where the sermon may have been preached), where he had previously healed Peter's mother-in-law, to a new city

called **Nain** (meaning “Pasture,” some 20+ miles to the southwest, about 5 miles south of Nazareth; **11**). From here, the geography speaks of the fame of Jesus spreading *through-out all Judea and all the surrounding country* (**17**). This apparently includes **the prison** in Macherus (today’s Jordan), 90 miles south of Capernaum to the east of the Dead Sea where **Josephus** tells us that John was thrown (*Antiquities* 18.5.2).

This fame causes the people to **seriously start to question** who this Jesus might actually be. Surprisingly, first it is John who questions (**19**), but then **Jesus, anticipating what they are all thinking, puts the question to the people** before they can ask (**24**). But how would anyone actually know? Could they even know? Yes, we can know. That’s a thought that Deconstructionists and others who have rejected the Faith just don’t want to deal with. It destroys their whole agenda, because leaving the faith is never neutral. But knowing is the reason why Luke gave us this Gospel to Theopolis, remember?

But the passage does not stop here, if we **read it together** as it is meant to be read. For after putting the question to the people, **a Pharisee**—someone known outwardly for being a believer, but who was instead was among those who were already deeply questioning Jesus, enters the picture. The



scene shifts to a house and dinner table, one of the most intimate places a handful of people can ever be together. In a remarkable but very different way, the question is essentially put to him. What would he do with the news? Believe it or deconstruct it and reject it?

The five units work together. The first and fifth are two stories of an outsider who has great faith, greater than anyone in Israel. Jesus performs two healings in these stories. The second and fourth put the question to us, first from John, then to the people. The third and middle shows us the answer in its purest form, how we can *know* objectively who Jesus is, while the outer two sections teach us how it is that we *accept* the truth that is right before our eyes, yet still out of sight for some people.

- A. The faith of an outsider: Centurion—servant healed (Luke 7:1-10)
- B. Jesus raised the widow's son: a great prophet has risen among us (11-17)
- C. Who is Jesus? He is the Coming One who fulfills what the prophets have spoken of him (18-23)**
- B'. No greater prophet than John the Baptist, the Messenger of Malachi 3:1 (24-35)
- A'. The faith of an outsider: The woman's great love—healed physically and spiritually (36-50)<sup>3</sup>

Each story is self-contained and can be read by itself. They are often preached alone. But I think looking at them together can be even more beneficial in trying to understand

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<sup>3</sup> Christine Smith, "Luke 7," *A Little Perspective* (Mar 11, 2016), <https://www.alittleperspective.com/luke-7-2016/>.

why Luke has put them all together and how they address this question.

## The Faith of a Centurion (Luke 7:1-10)

We begin in Capernaum. “*After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum*” (Luke 7:1). The tie-in to the Sermon on the Plain at the beginning here is not accidental, for in it, we are going to see Jesus living out the very words he has just preached to others.

“*Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him*” (2). The centurion is a commanding officer in the Roman army, who may have been working for Herod or was retired. As his title implies, he was a commander of 100 men. Curiously, given what Jesus has just said about the rich in this world who love their wealth, they were paid fifteen times that of a regular soldier.<sup>4</sup> In other words, he was almost certainly well-to-do.

This centurion had a servant, or better, a slave (*doulos*) whom he highly regarded. But he was sick. Dr. Luke doesn't tell us what he had, only that he was near death. There was no help for him at this point.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Strauss, “Luke,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 1, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 383.

Then a curious thing, on more than one level, occurs. “When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant” (3). **First**, why would a centurion even think that Jesus would do anything for his servant? Maybe he had just heard [of] the sermon? **Second**, he **sends the elders of the Jews**. These people are lumped in with Scribes and Pharisees and teachers of the Law in other places (**Luke 9:22; 20:1; 22:52; Acts 4:5, 8, 23**), which will make for an **interesting pairing** when we come to the fifth story. He wants them to ask Jesus to heal his servant.

So, **the elders oblige**. “And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, ‘He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue’” (4-5). Notice three things here. **First**, they say that **he is “worthy.”** In other words, they don’t think Jesus will do anything unless a man is first worthy of his time. This is precisely what we think of almost everyone, but it is the exact opposite of what he had just preached. **Second**, they appeal to Jesus’ sense of nationalism. This man loves our nation! **Third**, they are butter Jesus up. That’s what you do with celebrities. You tell them what they want to hear. On all counts, **they have deeply**

misunderstood Jesus. And they are the elders of Israel! Knowing this, you are now ready for the twist of the story at the end.

Because of their arguments, or *not*, Jesus “went with them.” “When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, ‘Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you’” (6-7). For the second time, the centurion sends someone. His friends give Jesus a very different message from the elders. Rather than, “He is worthy,” they tell Jesus, “I am not worthy.” This is the first small twist. You are already learning something here about *how* a person sees Jesus for who he really is.

The center of the story is vs. 7b, “But say the word, and let my servant be healed.” The centurion focuses on Jesus’ word. Simply by speaking, he believes Jesus can heal the servant, even without being near him. Why? I suggest it is two complementary reasons. *First*, he *recognizes his own unworthiness*. This *keeps him from blinding pride*. *Second*, we can read not being worthy as complementary to what comes next (technically a C C’ pairing), “For I too am *a man set under authority*, with 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” (8). It seems to me that because he was under someone else’s authority, he was able to recognize that even if he was paid handsomely for his job, he was not the end-all of humanity. His recognition that someone else was higher than he kept **his pride in check**.

But his **position in the army furthered his faith** in this way: Because he gives orders and those under him follow them without question, he is able to go to someone else higher than he, and if that person is able and wishes, he can give the order and heal his servant. He believes that Jesus is both able *and wishes* and so he goes to the Lord with this incredibly bold question. “**Please, let my servant be healed.**”

Luke tells us next that “**When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith’**” (9). The focus turns from the man back to the crowds. He calls them “Israel,” thus alluding back to the Elder’s saying that this man is worthy because he loves our nation (B B’). And what did Jesus talk about? His worthiness? His nationalism? His help in building the synagogue? **No, but his faith**. He says he’s never seen such faith anywhere in Israel. And this is a Roman centurion, someone not well loved, but respected out of fear, someone certainly not a Jew. This is not what anyone would be expecting. This is the main twist

of the story. The Jewish elders steeped in God's word can't see what a military foreigner can. Curiously, this will foreshadow the great movement of the Gospel to the Gentiles in the book of Acts.

The story finishes with a simple statement. “And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well” (10). There's no record of Jesus going to the house or of him even saying a word! He didn't tell the man that he would do anything. But the man believed. And as they came back to the house, the servant was healed of his near-death illness. It was a miracle.

## Resurrection and Elijah (Luke 7:11-16)

The second story takes place “Soon afterward...” (Luke 7:11). Jesus “went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him.” Notice that Jesus is doing all of this *in public*. Everyone knows what's going on. They all see it. The numbers are swelling even when he goes to a place he's never been. There is nothing secret about what Jesus is doing. What would he do next?

“As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd

from the town was with her” (12). Did Jesus know beforehand that this was going to happen? Is that why he went to Nain? The Scripture tells us that God loves the widow and the orphan. Jesus is God. “And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep’” (13). Nain is only a handful of miles from Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. She obviously knew that Jesus could work miracles, but she isn’t asking. This is obviously beyond anything anyone can do. The man is dead and they are already carrying him out of the town to bury him.

Notice that not only didn’t she ask for anything, nothing is said about her faith. This story is all about Jesus. “Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still” (14a). The “bier” (funeral plank) is a kind of coffin on which the body was placed. But why did everyone stand still? Because Jesus had just made himself ritually unclean. He touched the bier of a dead man. To come into contact with the dead is to become unclean (Num 9:6, Hag 2:12, etc.).

As, Jesus *said* to the woman, “Do not weep,” so now he *says* to the dead man, “Young man, I say to you, arise” (Luke 7:14b). Jesus’ word, the very thing the Centurion just believed in, is on center stage. What would happen?

“And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother” (15). If the man is alive, then Jesus

would not be unclean, would he? Jesus **destroys OT purity laws** by his very presence. But Jesus has just raised a dead widow's son. Sound familiar? It should. **Elijah** performed a similar miracle for the widow Zarephath (**1Kg 17:17-24**). Amazingly, Jesus had referred to this very episode back in ch. 4 when he told the people of Nazareth (just five miles from here), "... and **Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow**" (**Luke 4:26**). Does this imply that Jesus did know beforehand and that the Father had sent him here?

What do you suppose **the reaction of the people** would be to this? Luke tells you, "**Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and 'God has visited his people!'**" (**16**). This story ends here and it does not give you the impression that anyone is questioning anything. And yet, as we will see, this is precisely what is going on. For who are they *not* saying Jesus is? Think about that one as we go to the third story.

## John Questions Jesus' Identity (Luke 7:17-23)

The **middle story** of our passage begins, quite naturally, with "**this report about him**" spreading "**through the whole**



of Judea and all the surrounding country” (17). People had seen what Jesus did. People were talking about what Jesus did. **Everyone knew** what Jesus had done. And the word is travelling far and wide now, even beyond the northern regions of Galilee.

We learn next that, “**The disciples of John reported all these things to him**” (18). We do not have names, but **could it be** that Andrew was among them? We learn in John’s Gospel that he was a disciple of John (**John 1:35-40**). There’s no reason it couldn’t be. Whoever it was, unless John was still held up north, they likely had to travel some 75 miles south-east to Macherus where John was imprisoned.

Why had they wanted to tell their teacher about this? My guess is it was out of **excitement**, happiness, and faith. “**John, you won’t believe what Jesus did.**” But John is in jail. He is suffering greatly at the hands of Herod. He isn’t out running around up and down the Jordan baptizing anyone. He isn’t free to go here or there. John is trapped. A prisoner. And what has Jesus done for him, his own friend and cousin?

“**And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’**” (19). The *one to come* refers to the Messiah, the promised one of so many OT passages. John may

not be deconstructing his faith, but he certainly is **questioning it**. Rather than hear and believe the miracle, all he can think about is his own wretched situation. Can you blame him?

Many of the Reformers wanted to distance John from any kind of doubt whatsoever. **Calvin turned the story on its head and blamed the disciples** for not believing and essentially said that what John was doing here was for their sake. I don't think so. David Gooding gets at the truth. "It was all right his going about healing an odd slave here and raising a widow's son from the dead there—John had nothing against that. But what about the big issues? When was Jesus going to start putting *oppressive governments* right? Abolishing *evil rulers* like Herod? *Putting down the Roman tyranny* and giving Israel her political independence?"<sup>5</sup> This is **perfectly understandable**, and in fact **totally relatable**. When you live through the utter decline of a civilization, including its basic family structure, its entire education system, its political organization, and its ability of judges to care about right or wrong, often because all those people are engaged in heinous crimes just as John confronted Herod with, it is

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<sup>5</sup> **David Gooding**, *According to Luke: A New Exposition of the Third Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 134; quoted in **Philip Graham Ryken**, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 1, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 329.

easy to ask the same questions. **We just do it with the Second Coming rather than the First.**

But this is precisely why we must never go telling people that the good news is having your best life now. Heaven forbid. This is precisely what creates deconstructionists. Because it rarely happens, nor is it promised to us.

**Rather than address political concerns**, Luke tells us this in response to John's question, and it is **the very center of the chapter** and **the objective truth** of how you may know who Jesus really is. **"In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight"** (**Luke 7:21**). "Hour" here does not refer to a literal hour, but the time between the disciples of John leaving and returning. **Jesus did not stop healing**, did not stop exorcizing demons, did not stop making people see. **He just didn't stop to go help John.**

John had to learn the truth the hard way, because John was special. Biblically speaking, **God brings suffering** into the lives of his people whom he especially loves, so that they will be conformed to the image of the Suffering Servant who saved them and understand something more through their own suffering about what he did for them than most Christians will ever understand. The suffering is *not* the

blessing. God's grace through it and what he helps us to see is. If we believe.

Rather than address any of these political questions, the Lord answers John's disciples after Luke gives us his comment. The two are complementary. "And he answered them, 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them'" (22). Jesus is drawing on a number of passages from Isaiah, passages that John would have known intimately as Scripture and prophecy. *Isaiah 35:5-6: the blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear. Isaiah 61:1-2*, which he also told to his friends at Nazareth, before they tried to murder him: *The blind see, the poor receive good news. Isaiah 26:19: Your dead shall live, your bodies shall rise*. And, of course, let's not forget how Jesus is deliberately showing people that he is greater than Elijah in the previous story.

But Jesus finishes his comments this way. "And blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (Luke 7:23). Why? Because *Messiah is not meeting your expectations*. If I've said it about John, I've said it about us. People expect Messiah to be one thing. Quite often, *he destroys our expectations*. Nevertheless, he does do precisely what the Scriptures

promised that he would do, and not one thing less. If we are having a difficult time trusting in Jesus, it *isn't because he* wasn't publicly doing everything that was predicted about him. *It is because we* have some kind of moral beef with him. Jesus has given you perfectly objective proof that he is the Messiah. That's the whole purpose of this story with his close friend, John. It is right there for anyone to see. How would John respond? We do not get an answer from Luke. He doesn't even record John's death for us. Maybe that silence is an invitation to you to ask yourself how you will respond?

## Jesus Questions the Crowds (Luke 7:24-35)

The *fourth story* now feeds off of my question to you. In it, *Jesus addresses the crowds* about this very point. “*When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?’*” (Luke 7:24). They had obviously heard the exchange from the disciples and must then have been wondering about why John was wondering about Jesus. And they were probably starting to doubt too.

The image of the reed may be proverbial. You see something fragile, undependable, and easily swayed. Israel is described this way in **1Kg 14:15**. Egypt is likened to it in **Isa 36:6**. Was John some kind of easily swayed limp reed, some “spineless ‘yes-man’”<sup>6</sup> Some ship easily tossed to and fro? Hardly.

Or the image may be literal, referring to the actual flowers and reeds near the Jordan. This seems possible because of the next question. “What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing?” (**Luke 7:25**). In the last few months, as this insane transvestite agenda has been foisted upon this already pitch black world with reckless abandon, it is easy to have your mind go there. But Jesus has something more particular in mind (which was sometimes in complete agreement with that degenerate lifestyle, when you learn about certain Emperors). “Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings’ courts.” John is hardly in a king’s court. He is in a king’s *dungeon*! Bock summarizes the two questions this way, “People did not go to see John because of the scenery at the Jordan River or for a fashion statement! They came for another reason: to see a prophet.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Straus, 387.

<sup>7</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 211.

A third time Jesus asks, “What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, ‘Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you’” (26-27). Prophets were always known as the toughest and hardest of all people. Most of them were beaten or put to death for what they said. Jesus is saying that John is that prophet who was predicted by Malachi to be the very messenger (*aggelos*) who would prepare the way for the Messiah-angel of the covenant (Mal 3:1). “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.” Two messenger-angels. John and Jesus. John prepared the way.

There could be no greater prophet than this, for all the others saw the Messiah—as Messiah—only at a distance (they did know him as the Second Person, but not as a human). But John was his forerunner who baptized him. Thus, Jesus gives John the greatest honor anyone in the old covenant could ever have. “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John” (Luke 7:28a). Jesus has a

point to this. He is placing John on the highest possible pedestal in order to let the people know that even **the greatest among men has doubts**. John was not prone to these. He was the opposite. Yet, circumstances get the best of all of us. And make no mistake, John doubted.

In saying this, he is now preparing us for **the great turn of the tables**. “**Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he**” (28). In other words, to believe who Jesus is puts you in a completely different category, those born not of women, but of God. This is a kind of Lukan parallel to Jesus’ teaching to Nicodemus that **you must be born again**.

The ESV initially lead me to a **wrong interpretation**. It makes it read as if everyone totally missed the point, just like Nicodemus did. **Vv. 29-30** are parallels at the center of this story. “**When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him**” (29-30). It seems as if they are all focused on John and not on Jesus, be it a good focus or a bad one.

But a better translation might be this: “**Now all the people, even the tax-collectors, when they listened (to him), vindicated God’s righteous requirements by submitting to**



John's baptism."<sup>8</sup> This makes it clear that the tax-collectors and sinners came to John to receive God's salvation. This then creates a contrast with the Pharisees, who refused God's offer.

I was initially led to the first interpretation because of the next words. "To what then shall I compare the people of this generation..." (31). It makes it sound like Jesus is lumping everyone—Pharisees and tax-collectors together. But we will see soon enough that he isn't. This generation refers to this generation of rulers and lawyers and Pharisees and elders and those who follow them, but not necessarily everyone.

"What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep'" (31b-32). You have to understand what Jesus is doing here. He is telling them a parable. Bock calls it, *The Parable of the Brats*.<sup>9</sup> "Jesus likens the present situation to children playing make-believe games in the marketplace. One group plays a flute and calls the other to a game of joyful dance, probably a wedding feast. When the other children sulk and refuse to play, the first group switches to a

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<sup>8</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 11, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 398.

<sup>9</sup> Bock, NIV, 212.

dirge and calls on them to play a funeral game instead (appropriate for the sulkers!).”<sup>10</sup>

But who are the brats? Is Jesus essentially calling the Pharisees spoiled brats who won't accept anything God is doing? Or, is he saying that they are the children playing the game and that John and Jesus are the brats for not playing by their rules! He continues, “For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon’” (33). This is akin to the dirge game. “The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” (34). This is akin to the wedding ceremony. Either way, God can't win with legalists. It's impossible. No matter what you do, you are always wrong. Those deconstructing their faith because of legalism have a real beef. Ironically, they are often being legalists as they abandon the faith by saying that God isn't playing by their rules.

It seems that, “Many common people, following their leaders, now also rejected what they had formerly accepted.”<sup>11</sup> “This generation” isn't only the leaders. Surely some who were baptized by John had been convinced by their authorities. Perhaps most. It happens all the time. But not all.

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<sup>10</sup> Strauss, 386.

<sup>11</sup> Hendriksen, 399.

The main reason I think the tax-collectors did in fact receive salvation is because of the last comment. “Yet wisdom is justified by all her children” (35). Justified is the same word used of the tax-collectors (29). They declared God just. They are wisdom’s children. Wisdom, that is God, has saved them. This also fits with the parallel found in a different section in Matthew, “For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him” (Matt 21:32). Yes, John truly was the forerunner of the Messiah, and his ministry prepared the way for many to believe in him.

## Jesus Questions the Crowds (Luke 7:36-50)

The final story takes place in the home of one of these Pharisees. Think about the elders in the first story asking Jesus to go to another home as we read. “One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table” (Luke 7:36). We are still in the city of Nain. Jesus did not hate the Pharisees. He didn’t just eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners, but with them!

And this Pharisee wants him in his house, clearly seeing Jesus as a respected equal. But **why did Jesus go?** Like the initial reason and the death of that man, I believe Jesus **knew what was going to happen**. And what will happen will **perfectly illustrate** what he has just said about wisdom's children vs. this generation.

“**And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment...**” (37). This woman of the city, this sinner, perhaps a prostitute that everyone knew, parallels our **centurion**. **Both are outcasts** in their own ways. She hears that Jesus is in this house and so she brings to the house an alabaster flask of ointment. It was **perfume**, perhaps nard (**Mark 14:3; John 12:3**), and if so, it would have cost a year's wages.

Suddenly, she begins to weep. “**And standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment**” (38). This happens in Matthew, Mark, and John to Jesus in a totally **different context** (the last week of his life), with a totally **different person** (Mary) in a totally **different city** (Bethany), in a completely **different house** (Simon the Leper, not Simon

the Pharisee), and has totally **different reasons** (anointing him for his death). For these reasons, it is clearly **not the same story**.<sup>12</sup> Any why not? Jesus is forgiving some incredibly despised, unclean people of great and terrible sins. Those who know themselves forgiven much can't help but be overwhelmed when the Lord of Glory comes to them with such mercy.

So why is this story here? “**Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner’**” (**Luke 7:39**). He doesn't say it out loud. He thinks it. But I'm sure his body language gave it away. **Surely, he should know that this woman is unclean!** This is the same issue we saw with the dead man. Jesus is always touching unclean people, or letting them touch him. This is unthinkable with the law of Moses. But in this case, it is more than just ritual uncleanness. She is *morally* unfit. We have here contagious uncleanness. Jesus isn't playing the Pharisee's child's game.

Jesus stops him in his tracks, because **this is the reason he came** to this house. “**Jesus answering said to him, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ And he answered, ‘Say it,**

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<sup>12</sup> For a great discussion see **Darrell L. Bock**, *Luke: 1:1–9:50*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 689.

Teacher’” (40). Simon was a popular name. “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both” (41-42). A denarius was a day’s wage, so a couple of months of wages vs. nearly two years. Seems to be a fitting parable if she is giving up such expensive perfume to anoint Jesus.

Now comes the central question and verse of this story. “Now which of them will love him more?” (42b). There’s our question. Why do deconstructs deconstruct? Why do Pharisees not accept? Why does this sinner spend a year’s wages to wash Jesus’ feet?

Simon’s answer is rather funny, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt” (43). “I suppose.” Haha. Ya think? Did he think Jesus was trying to trap him? This isn’t a trick question.

“And he said to him, ‘You have judged rightly’” (43b). The problem with the Pharisee is not his ability to reason. Jesus continued because he wasn’t finished. “Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came

in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven-- for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.’ And he said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven’” (44-48).

Let the story impact you. The **house owner didn't do** a customary washing of feet. Abraham washed the feet of the three angels when they came to his house. Not Simon. But this stranger who didn't even live there washed Jesus' feet. She kissed them, showing her humility before him. Simon thought they were equals. She anointed him with expensive perfume. Simon did none of this.

Then Jesus says that **her sins are forgiven**, because she loved much. Her love showed that her sins are forgiven. Her sins were forgiven because she loved Jesus. This isn't about forgiveness because of what she did, but because **she loved the Lord**.

Then Jesus went and did what he did in **Luke 5:20**. He said to her, “**Your sins are forgiven.**” **Only God can forgive sins**, remember? And the response is similar, “**Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this, who even forgives sins?’**” (49). Who is this?

Who is this Jesus? Indeed, that is the question the entire passage has been seeking to answer.

## Deconstruction or Faith?

And that leads us to **the ultimate and final point** of Luke 7. We've seen that many people give up the faith for many different reasons. They often start with **feeling and experiences**, very bad things to put your trust in, that's for sure. But often, those do come from things that are themselves bad or difficult. People then justify their feelings with **things they feel are more objective**. But the heart of the matter is that people just don't want to be forgiven, often because they don't think they've done anything wrong, often more times because they don't want to stop and repent.

Sometimes, **our feelings get the better of us**. And we begin to doubt. Sometimes, people think they have good objective reasons for doubting and rejecting Jesus. John was in the former camp. And Jesus gave him **real, tangible proof** that he is exactly whom John thought he was—the Messiah, even if his views of what Messiah was to do were not quite right. We can believe Jesus because he healed people of diseases, raised the dead, exorcised demons, and gave sight to



the blind, made the lame walk, cleansed the lepers, restored hearing to the deaf ... and has preached the good news to the poor. And everyone knew it.

But **how does one receive this?** That's the question. And he told those at the table, indirectly, the answer as he turned to the woman, "**Your faith has saved you; go in peace.**" Faith. People like to say that Paul made faith up, that the Gospels never talk about salvation by faith alone. They've never read the Centurion. They've never read about this woman.

Centurions and sinners, outcasts and tax-collectors, prostitutes and widows. **Those who have great need** are those who can believe. Those who don't, they will never see Jesus for who he is. But they will convince themselves all day long that it's all a lie and a hoax. It isn't. Jesus is the Lord and he has come to give us life. Don't let your circumstances keep you from turning to him and receiving the good news that he saves sinners. Know what you are and humble yourself. Repent of your sins and make a right judgment. Then you will know for all eternity just who this Jesus is. He will prove himself to you and never let you down. He is the Lord God Almighty.

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