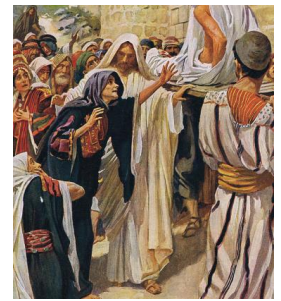


Luke 7:1-17 Up and Close with Jesus - 1



A. Four personal, up and close portraits of Jesus

These accounts are not from Jesus' scheduled ministry, but unplanned and even accidental ministry of Jesus to four particular individuals.

- a. They are from various backgrounds: 'a rich gentile'; 'a poor Jewish widow'; 'a political prisoner' and 'a prostitute'.
- b. The occasions were: Jewish elders' asking for prayer of healing; a run-in at a funeral procession; a group of men asking a question from their leader; and at a dinner hosted by the Pharisees. Each time Jesus ministers with the right words and action.
- c. With each encounter we see Jesus up and close, and see particularly his human side. Watch how the people's hearts move and how Jesus' heart moves - with faith, grief, doubt and love etc. In these four encounters you may find answers to the questions in your own heart.

Encounter 1: Gentile Centurion

1. An Outstanding Centurion in Capernaum

- a. The Beatitudes, the greatest sermon ended and Jesus was in the town of Capernaum by the lake of Galilee. A group of Jewish elders from the town came to Jesus with a request to pray for a gentile centurion's servant who is very sick and close to death.

'Centurion' was a man in charge of 100 soldiers though actual numbers vary, also translated as 'army captain' (Moffat). He was probably serving under Herod Antipas who imprisoned John.

Centurions '*must be...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.*' (Polybius). Under him were 'decurions' (commander of 10), and above him were 'chiliarch' and 'hegemon.'

- b. He was a man of impressive character, a man of 'rank', 'wealth', 'reputation', and also a kind man with deep concern for the weak, not only for his soldiers, but also for his slave. Often sick slaves were discarded quickly. Not only did he show concern for his slave, but also for the conquered people of Israel. He built a Jewish synagogue out of his own pocket! (There is a Capernaum synagogue in Roman style architecture.)
- c. Jewish elders testified to Jesus that he was a 'worthy man' because he loved the nation of Israel. What a testimony from the conquered people! How we treat the weak shows our character. What an impressive character! Centurions in the NT were often men of character and integrity. (C.f. 23:47; Acts 10:22).
- d. Jesus went to help him, but not far from his house the centurion sent a messenger to Jesus, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof..." (Luke 7:6-8)

2. Jesus' Response:

- a. Jesus 'marvelled' at him. Here we see Jesus' humanity. Jesus 'marvelled' twice: (1) here in Capernaum because of the gentile centurion's faith; and (2) in Nazareth because of Jewish people's 'unbelief' (Mk 6:6). What was the problem in Nazareth? 'Familiarity breeds contempt'. Jesus praised the centurion's faith before the crowd, 'I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel.' The messengers from the centurion found the sick slave healed when they returned (7:10).
- b. Jesus 'responds' to faith, not to rank, wealth, or even because he built a Jewish synagogue. But because this centurion had faith in Jesus. He 'marvelled' at his faith!
- c. Why did Jesus say the centurion had great faith?

(1) The centurion had never met Jesus, nor seen him perform miracles. He'd only heard about Jesus from credible sources, and that was enough for him to believe in Him. (2) The centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you under my roof, just say the word and that's enough." He didn't even have to see Jesus come and lay hands on his sick servant. The centurion believed Jesus' word was enough to heal his servant. That is great faith!

3. Personal Challenge

- a. Today we are like this centurion. He has never physically met Jesus in person. He didn't have Jesus to come and lay His hands on his servant. He said, "Lord, just say a word and that's enough. I believe." *Do you have the same attitude of faith today?* Jesus responds to faith. I simply believed Jesus' Word as a young boy, and that was enough to heal my back.
- b. Keys to the centurion's remarkable faith were: (1) 'humility'. Jesus spoke of 'great faith' twice and both were for gentiles. (C.f. Syrophenician woman, Mk 7:24-30). The Jews said of him, 'He is worthy,' but the centurion says of himself, "I am not worthy'. True faith is preceded by humility. 'Faith doesn't mix with pride.' (2) 'recognising spiritual authority' (7:8). The key word here is 'under'. The centurion stressed he too is 'under' authority, i.e. of the Roman Empire. He recognised Jesus was directly 'under' God's divine authority to heal the sick and to cast out demons. So then all sickness must obey His command. Today we are living in a culture that does not submit to authority, and therefore we do not fully experience the blessing of submitting to God's authority in our lives.
- c. Christian response to 2019-nCoV (Wuhan virus)

Infection rate in China is still up and not yet contained. Thankfully, outside of China it is very low. Next 2-3 weeks may show whether it will become 'pandemic' outside of China or not. We pray the upward trend will break soon.

What is our response? Panic and fear? Or is Jesus still our healer?

- (1) Know that the words of Jesus are true! The last day's trend includes pestilences. Jesus said when you see these things we must look up, for our redemption is near. Jesus' return is close.
- (2) Pray for the Chinese churches and for revival in China, and divine protection for all. C.f. Ps. 91
- (3) Sensible self-care including personal hygiene such as hand washing.
- (4) Time to move in faith, believing for the Lord to move in healing.

Encounter 2: Grieving Widow

1. A Grieving Widow in Nain

- a. The day after the encounter with the centurion, Jesus moved down to a town called Nain. (Today it is called 'Nein'.) A large crowd followed Jesus everywhere by now (7:11). From Capernaum to Nain is about a day's journey, about 40km south.
- b. As Jesus entered the town by the gate, Jesus' crowd met with another large crowd. It was a funeral procession for a poor widow whose only son had just died. With no husband, no son and no pension in those days, most probably she will become a beggar unless a close family member takes care of her. She was alone. Can you imagine her grief at the loss of her only son?

Imagine the scene: (1) an 'open coffin', not a casket but a simple wooden base with two poles carried by four men. The body was probably wrapped in grave clothes with a shawl over his face. (2) 'Professional wailers' would have been there to give a voice to the widow's inexpressible grief. 'Even the poorest in Israel should hire not less than two flutes and one wailing woman.' (Kethuboth 4:4). Note the importance of grieving for mental health. (3) The poor widow would be at the front of the procession, and therefore she would have met Jesus head on, as the crowds converged at the gate of Nain.

- c. Now on a little country road, one of them must give way to the other. Which one will it be? One crowd is following the funeral procession representing death. The other crowd is following Jesus who is life. Normally, everyone must give way to funeral procession because death took priority. But not this time because 'death' itself had to give way to the Prince of Life'. Luke refers to Jesus as the 'Lord' for the first time (7:13). Jesus is the 'Lord of Life'!

2. Jesus' Response to the grieving widow

- a. When Jesus 'saw' the widow, He had 'compassion' on her (Gr. 'splanchnizomai': 'inward parts', 'bowels' or 'kidneys'). This is another portrait of Jesus' humanity - 'full of compassion' (7:13). Compassion moved Jesus to action: (1) 'Do not weep'. Was her weeping was paining Jesus? (2) Jesus touched the coffin. Rabbis

couldn't touch coffins because it would defile them so they couldn't say public prayer for a day. (3) Jesus spoke to the corpse: "Young man, I say to you, arise" (7:14). The young man sat straight up at Jesus' word.

- b. What would you do if you are in a funeral service, and the dead person suddenly sits up in the coffin and begins to speak? Would you freak out or rejoice immediately? If it wasn't your child, you will probably freak out. That's what happened to these people. People's first response was fear - 'fear' came upon all (7:16). Afterwards they 'glorified God'. They said, "A great prophet has risen up among us," and "God has visited His people." (7:16).

The town of Nain is at the foot of Mt. Moreh, and there is another town nearby at the foot of the mountain called, 'Shunem', where Elisha raised the dead (2 King 4:18). So they recognised Jesus is a great prophet like Elijah and Elisha. (Also 'Endor' was just north of Mt. Moreh where Saul consulted the 'dead'. Some scholars say necromancy - contacting the dead - flourished in the area.)

3. Personal Challenge

- a. Death is a horrible thing. It is not natural, but unnatural, strange and cruel. Death was never God's original design for us. Death came into this world because of sin, and one day - unless Jesus returns in our life time - there will be our own funeral procession. There is only one way to turn that day of a profound grief and loss into a joyful celebration – interrupt that procession of death with another procession following the Prince of Life! Join Jesus' procession of life today! You must make a personal decision of faith.

Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation." (John 5:29)

Jesus also said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (John 5:24).

- b. Death is not the end. Nobody gets away from God into eternal oblivion and nothingness! One day the voice of Jesus will wake up everyone who is in the grave. And every soul must give account to God for the life they have lived. The only way you and I can be saved from eternal condemnation, is by coming to Jesus Christ and asking His forgiveness for our sin and receive eternal life by faith. We can do that today.

Does the voice of Jesus that will awake all the dead, give you excitement or fear? That tells me whether Jesus is a Friend or a Stranger to you.