

October 27

Luke 7 and 8

Matthew 8

Matthew 11 and 12

Luke 11

The two wonderful miracles recorded in Luke 7 are placed by Luke in the account at this point, to prepare us for the answer that Jesus would give to the disciples of John the Baptist, when they came to inquire as to whether or not Jesus really was the Messiah. This answer was significant.

Perhaps omnipotence is a new word to you. The prefix "omni" means "all" and "potency," of course, refers to "power." To say that Jesus Christ, or that God His Father, are "omnipotent" is to say that they are "all-powerful" -- able to do absolutely anything. He can cure the Centurion's slave by just speaking a word, and He can do it from a distance. He doesn't even have to be present!! That should be a source of great encouragement to us who do not have the physical, visible presence of Christ beside us when we are ill or in great need. He is with us. His physical, visible presence is irrelevant to His ability to speak a word of omnipotence into the very situation that you are encountering. To Jesus, it is only a matter of speaking a word, and the very power of God is immediately applicable to your situation and mine.

Christ's omnipotence is also evidenced in the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain. To cure a fever or banish a virus is one thing, but to restore life to one who has actually died - well that is quite another. That really takes power, and even to be able to do it, again, with just a word, is a powerful testimony to the deity of Christ. We are possessors of many of the words and promises of Christ. It is good from time to time to remind ourselves of just how powerful those words are. They are the words of the omnipotent Christ and He said, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will remain forever!*"

At the end of the chapter, in the remarkable story of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus, we are told that when Simon the Pharisee, in whose home the incident took place, saw what was happening, he said to himself, "Aha - if Jesus really was a prophet, He would know what kind of woman was touching Him. He'd know that she was a sinner!!" Simon, like any other good Pharisee, would never, never let a woman like that get anywhere near him! But Jesus was a prophet because He knew exactly what Simon was thinking; and Jesus "answered" Simon. Over and over again in the Gospels this phenomenon occurs - a person thinks something and Jesus, knowing full well what's in their mind because He is "omniscient", answers them even before they speak their thoughts.

The mercy of Christ is also here in full measure. He reaches out to a Gentile - a Roman soldier who asks for help; to a widow who has lost her only son - her only visible means of support and her only hope for continuing the family line; and Christ reaches out to her even though she didn't ask for help. He just takes mercy on her and raises her son to life again. Then He graciously accepts the anointing offered by a sinful

woman who is a social pariah, and totally unwelcome in the company of the other "righteous" people, and He says to her, "*Your sins are forgiven.*" That is a bold claim to divinity - only God has the authority to forgive sins. But Jesus claimed it for Himself.

The Roman Centurion is a model for us of faith and good intentions. The forgiven woman is a model of gratitude. Let's talk about each one briefly.

* The Centurion actually "amazed" Jesus. This centurion is compassionate - he cares about a slave. Other people sought to have Christ heal family members or friends. The Centurion cared enough about a slave to ask the help of Christ. He is generous - he has already built a synagogue for the Jews. He is loving - not only to his slave but also to the Jewish people over whom he serves. He is humble and sensitive. Because he knows that righteous Jews cannot defile themselves by entering a Gentile residence, he wants to give Jesus an alternative to that action. He is full of faith. Not only can Jesus heal but the centurion believes he can do it with a word from a remote location. Finally, he is perceptive - He understands spiritual authority better than anyone else in Israel!

* The forgiven woman is just as interesting as the soldier, first, because she came not to ask, but to give. Lots of people came to ask for things, very few to give. She brought a most expensive gift, an alabaster jar of perfume that could very easily represent a life's savings in that culture. She breaks it and pours it out extravagantly. Real gratitude produces a love that tends to be extravagant in its response. She is amazingly bold. Do you have any idea how hard it would be for a woman with the reputation of being a prostitute to come into the house of a Pharisee? Do you know what she was risking - not only in terms of humiliation and verbal abuse, but maybe even judicial condemnation and stoning? Real love, born out of the gratitude of a changed life, doesn't count the cost.

One last thing today...it relates to John the Baptist and the question he sent his followers to ask. John saw Jesus' ministry from an Old Testament perspective, that is from the view of the two Old Testament strands of prophecy regarding the Messiah - the one about the suffering servant who would redeem God's people, and the one about the Judge who would establish God's Kingdom forever. They were both pointing to the same time frame - at least that is what John thought. That helps us with the fact that John now asks for clarification. The one that Jesus said was as great as any other man who ever lived, this great man has doubts - He has questions. Sometimes I feel like I am sinful when I have doubts and I'm ashamed to admit that my faith isn't as strong as I would like it to be. John the Baptist had doubts.

His, like ours, stemmed from two sources:

- 1) the extremely stressful circumstances in which he found himself and
- 2) an incomplete knowledge regarding who Jesus Christ is. John did with his doubts what you and I must do with ours - he took them to Christ and acknowledged them, and Jesus Himself supplied the answers.

It is just like Luke to note the women who actually traveled with the company. Mary Magdalene is mentioned. Some have tried to identify Mary with the converted prostitute of Chapter 7 but there is no hard evidence for that identification. All we really know about Mary Magdalene is that Christ had cast seven demons out of her, which certainly implies a pretty terrifying past - and that she was one of Christ's staunchest followers - right to the very end. Joanna is mentioned, who was the wife of Herod's minister of finance or at least a very highly placed manager within Herod's personal household. She was one of Christ's ardent supporters also. This shows us once again the powerful ability of Christ to attract the most diverse sorts of people to His side. To think that the wife of a high government official could minister cheerfully beside Mary Magdalene, who had something less than a savory background, is really quite astonishing. And on the male side of Jesus' traveling company there is Matthew the tax collector, standing next to Simon the Zealot.

But that is what Christ's family looks like, rich and poor, conservative backgrounds, liberal backgrounds, well-educated and totally uneducated people - all together growing in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.