

## Chapter Seven (7:1-50)

### THE SON OF MAN VISITING MEN

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why would a centurion care so much about a slave (7:1-2)?
2. What was behind the unusual conduct of the centurion toward Jesus (7:3-10)?
3. Why were the people seized with fear when Jesus brought the widow's son back from the dead (7:16)?
4. Since John the Baptist had already called Jesus "the Lamb of God" why is he now asking Jesus if He "is the one" (7:18-23)?
5. How is John the Baptist "more" than a prophet (7:26)?
6. What is the meaning of "wisdom is justified by all her children" (7:35)?
7. Why was this woman in this Pharisee's house washing Jesus' feet with her tears (7:36-50)?

#### SECTION 1

#### The Sick (7:1-10)

7 After he had ended all his sayings in the hearing of the people he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup>Now a centurion had a slave who was dear to him, who was sick and at the point of death. <sup>3</sup>When he heard of Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his slave. <sup>4</sup>And when they came to Jesus, they besought him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, <sup>5</sup>for he loves our nation, and he built us our synagogue." <sup>6</sup>And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, 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 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 slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." <sup>9</sup>When Jesus heard this he marveled at him, and turned and said to the multitude that followed him, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such

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

**7:1-5 A Benevolent Conqueror:** After the Sermon on the Mount, somewhere in Galilee, Jesus entered the city of Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. A Roman army commander (a centurion, commanding 100 men) lived there and he had a servant who was “dear” to him; the Greek word is *entimos* and literally means, “very valuable.” Polybius, an ancient historian, says that the best man in the army held the position of centurion. Every centurion mentioned in the New Testament appears to be a “good” man (cf. Mt. 27:54ff; Lk. 23:47ff; Acts 10:1ff; 27:43; etc.). Most Romans were contemptuous of those they conquered and exploited the vanquished unmercifully. But this centurion was extraordinarily upstanding and good.

He had a slave (Gr. *doulos*) who was “at the point of death” (Gr. lit. reads, *emellen teleutan*, or “about finished.”). The word *entimos* might signify the slave was considered simply a valuable piece of property, but the complete picture of the centurion’s character shows a relationship to the slave much more humane and compassionate than that of “property-owner.” When the centurion heard of Jesus’ presence in Capernaum, he sent Jewish elders to find Him. (Matthew 8:5 says the centurion came for Jesus; this is no contradiction since the elders were his personal emissaries and it could understandably be said “he” came to Jesus). The centurion must have heard of Jesus’ healing power at some earlier date. Perhaps the centurion had first hand knowledge of the healing Jesus had done in the synagogue built by the centurion himself! The Jewish elders acclaimed the centurion worthy of Jesus’ help for they said he had built them a synagogue. The Greek idiom read, “. . . the synagogue he, even he, built for us . . .” This may indicate that the centurion paid for its building. The centurion loved (Gr. *agape*) their nation. He was not merely friendly and brotherly (*phileo*), but he had the concern of the Jewish people on his heart and mind. He willingly cared for them. This was even more unusual—a Roman concerned about the whole Jewish nation!

**7:6-10 A Believing Commander:** More of the excellency of this centurion’s character is now exhibited. He was a humble man. When Jesus started for his home, he sent messengers saying, “. . . do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; and the very reason I did not come to you personally was that I did not consider myself worthy.” Humility such as this was unheard of among Romans! He was a man of reason. He had testimony or evidence from some source that Jesus had healed sick people. He used his reasoning powers to decide what he had heard was true. Thus he believed Jesus could heal his dying slave without even coming into his home. Alexander

Campbell once said, "Reason deciding that the testimony is true, is believing; reason deciding that the testimony is false, is disbelieving; reason unable to decide, is skepticism." Faith or belief is built by the use of reasoning processes. Faith comes in this order: Fact-Testimony-Faith-Feeling. Many people try to reverse that order and build their faith from feeling, but feeling is the result of faith, not the foundation of faith. Facts testified to and believed on the basis of reasonable verification of the testimony is Biblical "faith." Faith is only as good as its Object; the Object is only as trustworthy as it evinces itself to be. Christian faith is in an objective Person—Jesus Christ. He has demonstrated His trustworthiness through historical facts which have been testified to by trustworthy historians. When our reason accepts the testimony, we then have evidence to believe Jesus *is* who these historians say He is. This is the same process of reasoning the centurion used to call upon Jesus for help in this life and death situation. The centurion was also a man who understood that faith and obedience are inseparable. He knew that trusting someone meant you committed your life to that person in obedience. He himself was a man who obeyed his superiors because he trusted them and he expected trustful obedience from those committed to his leadership. He was convinced of Jesus' authority so he believed that whatever Jesus said should and would be obeyed.

Jesus marvelled at him (Gr. *ethaumasen*). Only twice in the gospel records is Jesus said to have marvelled—once at unbelief (Mk. 6:6) and once, here, at belief (Lk. 7:9; Mt. 8:10). Jesus marvelled not because He was unaware that such a faith could exist, but because He *was* aware of how vibrant and alive the centurion's faith was. Compare this Gentile's faith with that of most of the Jews Jesus spoke to and you will see why He marvelled. The Jews had centuries of divine revelation and providence to prepare them to believe the Messiah when He came, but most of them rejected Him. This Gentile had *no* "oracles of God" (cf. Rom. 3:1-2; 9:1-5) such as the Jews had and no centuries of preparation, yet he believed. Faith is measurable, but the Lord measures by quality, not by quantity. The statement of Jesus about "faith as a grain of mustard seed" has nothing to do with quantity; it refers to the vitality or life-force that is in the seed. Faith is not a question of how much, but what kind. This centurion had no quantitative measurement of faith but what little he knew of Jesus gave him a powerful faith because it was active, alive and obedient. Jesus was thrilled by it! Jesus was also pleased by the character of the man. Normally, when a slave was unable to work, he was thrown out to die by his Roman lord. Normally, Romans hated Jews and considered them filthy, ignorant and untrustworthy. But this Roman was different! He was compassionate, benevolent and loved the Jews. He may have been a Jewish proselyte although the text does not say so.

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Matthew records (8:11-12) that Jesus gave a glorious prediction of the salvation of many of the Gentiles as well as a chilling prediction of the doom of the unbelieving Jews. Isaiah, the prophet, had made similar predictions in connection with the coming of the Messiah. Jesus honors living, obedient faith wherever it is found. There are no racial, cultural, social or economic prerequisites required by Jesus.

Matthew also records the tender words of Jesus, "Go; be it done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed in that very moment. Luke records that the elders and friends first sent by the centurion became witnesses to the fact that the miracle had taken place. It is interesting to note that Jesus did not go to the centurion's home, did not lay hands on the slave, did not even meet the centurion himself; and there is no record that the slave had any faith in Jesus. This healing greatly contrasts to the requirements of the pseudo faith-healers of modern times.

We should learn from this incident:

- a. Do not be hasty to classify men. We usually think of all Romans as in the same category with the Caesars or Pilates of that day. But here is a Roman very much different! There may have been many more.
- b. Obedience is the only reasonable and proper response of a confession of faith. Faith and obedience are inseparable. When the authority of Jesus is recognized and acknowledged, just a word from Him should be sufficient to produce action from us.
- c. Jesus is Savior of all men. There are no special people for Him. Wherever He finds faith, He honors it. He expects to find faith in all men. Those who do not believe in Him are doomed to an eternity of torments.
- d. We can demonstrate the quality of our faith in Jesus by helping others. The Son of Man is willing and able to visit the sick through those who have an obedient, living faith like the centurion's.

## SECTION 2

### **The Sorrowing (7:11-17)**

11 Soon afterward he went to a city called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. <sup>12</sup>As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city 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>And he came 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 he 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 concerning him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

**7:11-13 Compassion:** Nain is about 20 miles southwest of Capernaum; a good day's walking distance. It is about 2 miles west of Endor—a place famous for a temporary resurrection from the dead (Samuel) in the days of King Saul. As Jesus drew near to the gate of this village He came upon a funeral procession. A young man had died and left his widowed mother without any visible means of support. This woman was in great sorrow not only because she had lost both husband and son and was now without the companionship of those nearest and dearest on earth, but also because she would be frantic to know where to turn for physical help and sustenance. A job market for women whereby they might earn a living was unheard of in those days. Women were expected to marry and keep house. Jesus had compassion on this heart-broken, weeping widow and said, "Do not weep." Then He touched the bier.

The Hebrew word for coffin is *mittah* (II Sam. 3:31); the Greek word is *sorou* (Lk. 7:14) and is translated here *bier*. Closed coffins as we know them were unknown among the Hebrews. The bier was an open, flat, wooden frame on which the corpse was carried from the house to the grave. Burial was usually very soon after the death of a person (less than 10 hours) because of hygienic reasons. Anyone who touched a dead body or anything which a dead body might contact, was declared by Old Testament law, unclean for seven days (Numbers 19). Jewish funeral processions were highly emotional and demonstrative. The corpse was usually dressed in clothes worn normally, stretched out on a bier with a cloth thrown over it (Acts 5:6). Sometimes burial spices were added to the body. The poor were buried in earthen graves; the rich in rock-hewn tombs. Lack of proper burial was regarded as a great indignity and a judgment of God. The funeral procession from the home to the grave was accompanied on foot by friends and relatives of the deceased, weeping, wailing and casting dust and ashes on their heads. Sometimes mourners tore their clothing near the neck of their garments as a sign of grief. Usually every funeral was attended by hired mourners paid by the family of the deceased. When the funeral procession started toward the burial place, the women would go first because, the rabbis said, "as Eve, a woman brought death into the world, women should lead death's victims to the grave." Funeral processions were always noisy with graphic demonstrations of mourning (whether there was much

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sorrow or not). The Hebrews considered it very improper not to have loud wailing and mourning at a funeral. Flutists, playing sad music on their instruments, also accompanied these processions. When the sad rites were finished at the grave, the family would gather for a funeral meal, to eat "the bread of mourning." Mourning lasted for 30 days; for the first three days, no work was done at all, and no greeting answered in the street.

The Greek word used to describe Jesus' *compassion* is *esplagchnisthe*. There are other Greek words translated compassion, but this word connotes the feeling of psychosomatic emotions. It is the word translated "bowels" in the KJV. The "bowels" or intestines were regarded by Greeks and Hebrews as the seat of passion and affection. What Jesus felt for this widow and the mourners was intense and deeply emotional. While Jesus had compassion for the weeping widow, at the same time He *commanded* her (*klaie*, Gr. imperative mood), "Weep not!" A godly person knows when and what to weep about. Stoicism is no Christian virtue. Jesus wept—more than once (Jn. 11:35; Lk. 19:41; Heb. 5:7). But believers are not to grieve as those who have no hope (I Thess. 4:13). Perhaps Jesus is encouraging this widow and these mourners to refrain from excessive grief and to look to Him as Lord of life. Life is to be found by looking beyond death through trust in Christ. Penitence for the *sin* that brings death is the proper expression of mourning. This is what Jesus wept about! "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

**7:14-17 Celebration:** Jesus raised the widow's son from the dead. This incident is one of at least three resurrections from the dead performed by Jesus recorded in the gospels (Jairus' daughter, Lk. 8:49ff; and Lazarus, Jn. 11). Luke alone tells of the widow's son, but his credibility is unassailable. A physician would hardly record such a story without checking out all details. The fact that Luke alone records this incident merely confirms the statement in John's gospel (Jn. 20:30-31) that there were many miracles, teachings and events in Jesus' life not recorded at all. He might have raised more than three!

Jesus could have raised this young man from the dead at a distance as He had healed the dying slave of the centurion; He could have walked alongside the funeral procession and brought the lad back to life without a word or a touch, but He chose to touch the bier. His objective was not merely to bring a dead man back to life but to bring the comfort of salvation to any who would believe in Him as Lord, so He must show that the power of Life resides in Him. For a Jew to touch a dead body or anything a dead body had defiled made the Jew ceremonially unclean for seven days (cf. Num. 19:11ff). Death is the result of sin (Gen. 2:17). When a man died, he was a symbol of sin, and his body a source of defilement to the living. Jesus was not defiled because He was without

sin. He demonstrated vividly by touching the bier of the dead that He is the Lord of death and life—He is the solution, the cure for sin and its results. Those who trust Him will conquer death because He has conquered it for them.

Jesus spoke to the dead man. Jesus expected the dead man to hear him and respond by sitting up. Either Jesus was who He claimed or a complete maniac. Any man who would go out into a street today, stop a funeral procession, command the mourners to stop weeping, touch the casket and say to the dead person, "I say to you, arise," would be called a lunatic and probably incarcerated.

The dead man sat up and began to speak. And He gave him to his mother. Unbelievers try to destroy the historicity of this event by declaring it to be a "myth."

- a. Such declarations are arbitrary. No *evidence* is offered to prove it is a myth. Where is the testimony from the first century that what Jesus did was mythological?
- b. Such a declaration is contrary to the authenticity and credibility of the record of Luke the physician. And there *is* evidence from the first century to establish Luke's veracity.
- c. Such a declaration impugns the character of Jesus. The gospels portray Him as honest, trustworthy, compassionate and a doer of good. How could He be guilty of such dissimulation if He only pretended to raise a dead man.
- d. It is incredible to suppose every time Jesus sought to raise someone from the dead that He could chance upon someone only apparently dead or in a coma.
- e. Those eyewitnesses to this resurrection did not react as if it were mythological or allegorical. They were seized (Gr. *elaben*, "taken") with fear. Something unnatural, extraordinary and amazing happened.

Moments before this whole company of people had been possessed with mourning, bitter wailing, grief and sadness. Now it is turned into a celebration of happy praise for God. Those who witnessed this awesome event testified, "A great prophet has arisen among us! . . . God has visited His people!" The idea that God would "visit" His people is a Messianic expression of both the Old and New Testaments. It is particularly expressed in Isaiah 7:14 in the term "Emmanuel" which means "God with us" (see also, Mt. 1:23; Zeph. 2:7; Isa. 29:6; Lk. 1:68, 78; Lk. 19:44; Psa. 8:4; Heb. 2:6). The report of this miracle spread throughout the land of the Jews, reaching even down into Judea. We wonder how many believed in Jesus as a result of the report. One thing is certain, it is proof that Jesus means what He says about some day calling all the dead from their tombs (Jn. 5:28-29, etc.), some to eternal life, others to eternal damnation.

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### SECTION 3

#### The Suffering (7:18-23)

18 The disciples of John told him of all these things. <sup>19</sup>And John, calling to him two of his disciples, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you he 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 he who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" <sup>21</sup>In that hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many that 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 he who takes no offense at me."

**7:18-20 Confusion:** Some of the disciples of John the Baptist reported to the imprisoned John all the great miracles of compassion and the words of encouragement and hope Jesus was teaching during this great Galilean campaign. John the Baptist had been arrested and imprisoned about a year earlier near the middle of Jesus' first year of public ministry. Josephus records that John had been incarcerated in Machaerus, a fortress built in 90 B.C. by Alexander Jannaeus in the desolate wilderness east of the Dead Sea. It was the second most important fortress in Palestine, had been refortified by Herod the Great, and used as a winter residence. John was only about 33 years old when he was put in the dungeon at Machaerus.

John the Baptist had preached emphatically that the Anointed of the Lord, the Messiah, was to come shortly and lay the axe to the root of the tree and hew down every tree that did not produce the fruit of repentance (see comments, Lk. 3). He had been imprisoned for insisting that Herod Antipas repent of an adulterous marriage to his brother's wife. Matthew says (Mt. 11:2) John was in "a place of bonds and fetters" (Gr. *desmoterion*) when he heard of Jesus' ministry of compassion. The scriptures indicate Herod had many conversations with John when he was imprisoned—perhaps some badgering of John that his predictions of an avenging Messiah were, after all, wasted. So, when John heard that Jesus was healing people instead of judging them, bringing people back to life instead of slaying them, preaching good news of forgiveness instead of the wrath of God, he sent two of his disciples to question Jesus.

John's problem with Jesus was not whether He was the Messiah or



not but whether He was conducting the messianic program as He should. Jesus' program was not conforming to the vivid announcements John had made in the wilderness. So John asked, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" While Luke used the Greek word *allon* for "another" (which generically means, "another of the same kind"), Matthew used the word *heteron* (which means, "one of another kind"). John's problem was not doubt, it was impatience. Many of Jesus' own disciples were impatient with the way Jesus conducted His messianic program. Hobbs says, "It was not a question born out of doubt but of perplexity. He expected the two pictures (judgment and salvation) to be fulfilled simultaneously. Both pictures are true, but they are fulfilled within God's will and according to His purpose." Foster writes, "John was too anxious to see the Messiah coming on the clouds of heaven in flaming fire to bring destruction upon the wicked and to bring succor to the noble. He had not been willing to tarry with the Messianic predictions of humble service, mighty miracles, and sufferings and death for the sins of the world."

**7:21-23 Clarification:** Jesus sent word back through John's disciples to John clarifying the essential nature of the earthly ministry of the Messiah. Contrary to popular Jewish opinion (apocryphal) the Messiah's ministry was to be one of hope and healing. Hope that the next life would be blessed and free of sin and sickness through the power of faith in Christ to heal both body and soul; this was what the Messiah came to announce. The essence of the Messianic ministry had long ago been prophesied (cf. Isa. 29:18-19; 35:5-7; 61:1-3). When John wrote his gospel record (some 60 years after Jesus' crucifixion) he reminded his readers, "For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn. 3:17). Impatient men have continually cried out for God to judge the world, but God is long-suffering not wishing that any should perish so He is giving the world a message of hope and healing. The time will come, in God's divine plan, for judgment. Presently, however, it is time for hope and healing. Blessed is the man who imitates the longsuffering of God and does not "stumble" at God's patience through the Messianic ministry. Jesus chastened John the Baptist but He did so tenderly. The Greek word *skandalizomai* means, "offended, stumbled, tripped-up, trapped"; we get the English word, "scandalized," from it. Jesus does not want his ministry to become a stumblingblock to John the Baptist, but John must clearly understand Jesus' ministry will be conducted in God's way and God's own good time, and He will not alter His ministry to suit John's human misconception. Suffering humanity continues to cry out, "How long, O Lord . . ." (cf. Rev. 6:10), and the Lord continues to say, "In a little while . . ."

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### SECTION 4

#### **The Superficial (7:24-35)**

24 When the messengers of John had gone, he began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>25</sup>What then did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are gorgeously appareled 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 thy face, who shall prepare thy way before thee.'

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

<sup>29</sup>(When they heard this all the people and the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John; <sup>30</sup>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 men of this generation, and what are they like? <sup>32</sup>They are like children sitting in the market place and calling to one another,

'We piped to you, and you did not dance;  
we wailed, and you did not weep.'

<sup>33</sup>For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'He has a demon.' <sup>34</sup>The Son of man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' <sup>35</sup>Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

**7:24-30 Perversity:** John the Baptist had been a "fire-eating" prophet of the judgment of God upon his own nation so filled with materialism and hypocrisy. Many people had initially heard John's preaching with excitement (Lk. 3:15), but the penetrating righteousness of the truth he preached soon began to work on their consciences and they began to denounce him. Jesus takes this most opportune situation (John's asking about His ministry) to vindicate John's faithfulness in his ministry and his message as the revelation of God.

Jesus challenges their motives for first going out to hear John. What did they expect or want when they went to John—a fickle, unstable, vacillating "good-old-boy" who would bend with the ebb and flow of human opinion like a reed bends in the wind? Did they expect or want a preacher who was self-indulgent, fawning after those in positions of human power like those of Herod's court or like Herod himself fawning

after the Romans? Jesus' rhetorical question implies that this is indeed what many of them wanted. That is why they turned away from John the Baptist. He was certainly no vacillating, self-indulgent pawn of human tyrants. He was in prison because he dared to condemn a king's conduct. He was a prophet—and more than a prophet! He was the forerunner of the Messiah predicted by the prophets (esp. Malachi 3:1). He held a special place of service in God's redemptive program afforded no other prophet. Jesus added this epitaph, to which a literal Greek translation adds idiomatic emphasis: "I tell you, greater among those born of women than John, no one is!" This applies not only to John's position as forerunner, but to John's personal character. Jesus said John was the greatest man in the human race. That statement of Jesus minimizes much of what the world calls "greatness" in human beings. John had none of the trappings of worldly power, worldly wealth, sophistication, travel, education, longevity and yet among those born of women, not a greater has ever lived.

Then Jesus utters a very interesting and paradoxical statement, ". . . yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." Hobbs puts it this way, "He (John) stood on the shoulders of all foregoing prophets as the one forerunner of Him whom they foresaw. But those coming thereafter stand on John's shoulders. . . . He saw only one picture of the Christ. But those who have come after him see the whole: death, resurrection, promised return and coming judgment. We see the end from the beginning." Jesus means that those who have become Christians have their covenant enacted upon better promises (cf. Heb. 8:6). Those who believe in Christ after the cross and resurrection and the ministry of the Holy Spirit have seen God as John the Baptist could never have seen Him. As great as John's position and character was, those who believe in the Christ after him have a much greater privilege. Do we not also have greater responsibility? Only the perverse would reject the message John preached. What he proclaimed was so transparently true only the calloused hypocrite would object to it. When Jesus announced that John was God's forerunner of the Messiah and that he was the greatest, in God's scheme of things, among all the prophets, many sinners "justified" (Gr. *edikaïosan*) God, by submitting to John's baptism. The word "justified" means they declared God to be right (as He spoke through John) that they needed to repent and be baptized by John. So they did! "Justifying" God means to put God in His rightful place, Absolute Sovereign in one's life. But the Pharisees and lawyers, hypocrites who pretended to worship God, rejected the "purpose" (Gr. *boulen*, "will, counsel, deliberate design") of God for themselves (which was forgiveness and repentance) refusing to be baptized in John's baptism. These hypocrites, no matter how much they pretended, would

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not put God in his rightful place—Sovereign over their lives. Why? Because, as Jesus would soon reveal (Lk. 7:43ff), they did not think they needed forgiveness or repentance!

**7:31-35 Petulance:** Those who wish only a superficial relationship to God and truth will find every excuse possible to have it. The Pharisees and other hypocrites of that age were like petulant children of the streets. They did not want to play God's game at all. When John the Baptist came, they said John's concepts are too austere. John is all doom and gloom and judgment. John demands too rigid a life—he is too ascetic. So they would not accept John's concepts. When Jesus came, they said His concepts were too liberated, too normal, too cheerful. Jesus is a wine-bibber and a glutton. So they would not accept Jesus' concepts. They condemned in Jesus what they implied John should have manifested, and condemned in John what they implied Jesus should have manifested. They simply were not going to play God-games unless they could dictate the rules. They really did not want to play at all so they said neither John or Jesus was playing the right game.

But Jesus' reply was, "Wisdom is justified by all her children." In other words, the rightness of both John's ministry and His is vindicated by what those ministries were producing—repentance and faith and changed lives! As seen by superficial people, who really did not want to see, the ministries of John and Jesus might have appeared to be in conflict. But that was because the hypocrites, Pharisees and others, judged them by human standards. Their concept of the "kingdom game" was human power, exploitation of the poor and ignorant, manipulation through human traditions and violent wresting of the kingdom from God's hands into their own (cf. the parallel to this incident in Mt. 11:7-19). So they said neither John nor Jesus knew anything about the "kingdom game" at all. Jesus said, Wait and see—what John the Baptist and I both say about the kingdom will be proven to be true! There are still worldly-minded people with superficial views of the kingdom of God, acting like spoiled brats, unwilling to accept Christ's mind on the kingdom. They do not want to play by God's "rules" so they either try to destroy the game for others or do not get in the game at all!

### SECTION 5

#### **The Self-Satisfied (7:36-50)**

36 One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and took his place at table. <sup>37</sup>And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was

at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, <sup>38</sup>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. <sup>39</sup>Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, 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."

<sup>40</sup>And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?" <sup>41</sup>"A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. <sup>42</sup>When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" <sup>43</sup>Simon answered, "The one I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." <sup>44</sup>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."

**7:36-39 Condemning:** Although Jesus despised the attitudes of most of the Pharisees, He never refused an opportunity to try to convert one. While He was in Capernaum, a Pharisee of that city invited Jesus to dine with him. Along with making a great show about their religious practices (Mt. 6:1-18) the Pharisees enjoyed making a great show of their wealth and position by inviting certain "select" famous and popular people to dine with them. They would never invite the poor, starving, *am-haretz* ("people of the land") whom they classified as "sinners" who did not know anything (see Jn. 7:48-49). Often men of such attitudes would allow the poor and common people to stand off at a distance in the court-yard of their homes and like spectators, "entertain" themselves watching the rich and mighty dine.

As Jesus was reclining (Gr. *kateklithe*) (see comments on Lk. 5:29ff) at dinner (probably evening meal), "behold" (surprise), a woman who was in the city, a sinner came and anointed His feet. The Greek idiom places emphasis on the fact that this woman had a reputation for being a "city sinner." This usually meant prostitution. We do not know exactly

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what her sin was. The silence of the scripture probably is a caution to us that the precise nature of her sin should not be as important to us as the example of her grateful attitude. Jesus later indicates that the *amount* of one's debt, though significant in man's estimation, is not so in God's since the debtors were both forgiven, regardless of the amount.

The woman's actions, the context, and the use of the Greek perfect tense verb *sesoken* in v. 50 (has saved and is continuing to save you) indicates that Jesus may have encountered the woman before this incident and forgave her sins. That is why, when she heard Jesus was in Simon's house, she came expressing in a highly emotional way her gratitude for having been forgiven by Jesus. She brought with her an *alabaster* (plaster of paris) jar (usually very beautifully decorated, expensive and delicate) filled with ointment (Gr. *murou*) myrrh—imported and expensive. She stood at the foot of the couch weeping, and her tears fell on Jesus' feet and made them wet. Quickly she knelt and kept wiping off (Gr. *exemassen*, imperfect) the tear drops with her long hair. It was a shame for a Jewish woman to let down her hair in public. That was only a custom of tradition and this woman would not let her gratitude to Jesus be hindered by the traditions of men. She began to kiss or embrace the feet of Jesus profusely (Gr. *kataphilei*) and to rub the very expensive perfume from her alabaster jar on His feet. This woman gladly did the most humiliating, servile deed to Jesus that could customarily be done in that era while at the same time gladly rubbed on His feet the most expensive and precious thing she possessed.

All this made no impression on Simon, the Pharisee. His only concern was that Jesus was allowing the woman to touch Him at all. Simon thought to himself, "If this fellow (not even the courtesy to use Jesus' name in his thoughts) were a prophet (some ancient manuscripts have "the" prophet), he would have known who and what *sort* (Gr. *potape*, originally a word meaning "of what country," thus Simon had already categorized her as "alien" to his own social class and not to be associated with) of woman this is who is touching him, because she is a sinner." Why did Simon think such condemning things about this woman (and Jesus)? Because, as we shall see, he was self-righteous. He did not consider himself a sinner—he owed no debt to God—felt no need for grace and therefore had no gratitude in his heart.

**7:40-50 Condemned:** Jesus answered the thought of Simon's heart. Jesus did not have to wait for men to express what they thought—He could know supernaturally what men thought (cf. Jn. 2:23-25). Jesus used a favorite teaching vehicle, the parable, to try to expose to Simon the evil of his heart toward both Himself and the woman. Jesus' parables were always true to life. He never told a parable that was divorced

from reality. What He parabolized was always true whether of this life or the next (cf. Lk. 16:19ff). He may have had two specific (but unnamed) debtors known to Him personally in mind as He told this parabolic account.

We are not certain about the modern worth of a *denarius*. Most commentators believe it was worth a day's wages in Jesus' time. Whatever the case, the real point of this true-to-life story is the graciousness of the creditor, and the attitude of the debtors. The disparity between the amounts owed is not really significant for neither could pay their debt. The one who loved the forgiving creditor the most was the one who realized how totally unable to pay he had been and how totally forgiven he was. The sheer power of the logic in Jesus' parable forced Simon to give the correct answer or appear to be a fool. But Simon's ego was not in touch with his mind for what he was forced to answer by logic he refused to answer in his heart. Simon had looked upon the woman as a "great" sinner and upon himself as no sinner. The woman knew she had been much in debt to God and when Jesus forgave her she loved much — was deeply grateful, and showed it. Simon showed no gratefulness to Jesus because in his own estimation he had received no graciousness from God. Simon did not think he needed any grace! This attitude is *extremely crucial*. The apostle Paul makes *ingratitude* (Rom. 1:21) the fundamental source or reason behind the Gentile rejection of God and the terrible sinfulness of mankind described in subsequent verses. *Ingratitude* is the immediate child of pride and self-righteousness.

Although Simon answered with indifference, perhaps even flippancy, he answered correctly. He pronounced his own condemnation, whether he realized it or not. Jesus, turning toward the woman, but talking to Simon, said, "Do you see this woman?" Now Simon had seen the woman for he judged Jesus on the basis of having seen what the woman was doing. But Simon had seen the woman through his self-righteous perspective and not according to the truth which logic had just forced him to conclude. That is why Jesus so often referred to the Pharisees as "blind" (cf. Mt. 15:14; Mt. 23:16; Jn. 9:39-41). Simon's self-righteousness not only blinded him to the woman's motives, and to Jesus' character, it also blinded him to the need to express the commonest courtesies toward a guest as Jesus graphically points out.

Simon, and many of his fellow Pharisees, fell into the ageless trap of the devil of "measuring themselves by one another, and comparing themselves with one another," and being bereft of understanding which the apostle Paul outlines to the Corinthian church (II Cor. 10:7-12). When we measure ourselves by other human beings we usually select those who "are not as good as we are" so we make ourselves look better. When we measure ourselves by one another we are always using imperfect standards and, always able to find ourselves "better" than our standards, we justify ourselves and declare ourselves able to stand on our

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own merits without need of the grace of God. Simon compared himself to the woman and he should have compared himself to God. We should all compare ourselves to Jesus and learn that we need His forgiving grace.

The perfect tense of the Greek verb *apheontai* ("are forgiven") like the perfect tense of the verb *sesoken* ("has saved" v. 50) indicates that this had already occurred at some time past and that the fact remained true at the time Jesus spoke. As Applebury points out, "her faith had saved her at some point in the past and the fact remained at the moment when He was speaking to her. Her faith, not her love was the cause of her being forgiven. Love follows forgiveness, just as in the story of the debtors." Actually, our love is in response to God's—our love is a "re-bounded" love (cf. I Jn. 4:19). Faith (trust) comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17) and then comes love. Feeling does not precede reason. Fact, testimony, faith, feeling—in that order. When the testimony that God has forgiven our sins in Christ is believed, then we begin to have feelings of gratitude and love and adoration. As Alexander Campbell once put it, "No one ever shed a tear over the crucified Christ where it was never heard!"

Jesus' statement, ". . . go in peace" was more than a mere dismissal. For a Hebrew the word *peace* (*Shalom*) means "wholeness, integrity, well-being, goodness." He was admonishing her to continue in wholeness and integrity.

Although Simon the Pharisee had condemned the woman and questioned Jesus' character for associating with her, he actually condemned himself. Whether he had a change of heart or not, we do not know. God does! Some Pharisees did! It is not impossible for a Pharisee to renounce self-righteousness and be forgiven (cf. Phil. 3:4-16), and thus be saved.

### STUDY STIMULATORS:

1. What is a "centurion" and how does the one of Luke 7 compare with others?
2. How did the centurion's experience as a soldier help him relate to Jesus?
3. What was so unique about the centurion's faith that Jesus would marvel at it?
4. Since Jesus had compassion on the widow of Nain, why did He command her to cease weeping?
5. Is this resurrection from the dead a myth or a real event? Prove it!
6. Why do you think John the Baptist wanted to know if Jesus were "the One"?
7. Why did Jesus consider it necessary to defend the ministry of John the Baptist?
8. Why did the "sinner" woman weep upon Jesus' feet and wipe them with her hair?
9. What is the real point of the "parable of the two debtors" Jesus told Simon?