

Because the bible reading is a bit longer than normal today, and it has various scenes inter-playing with each other (that I want to bring out), it might be best if I read it myself.

Luke 7:1-35

Jesus has just finished giving a significant section of teaching – teaching that was very challenging BTW.

Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant

7 After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. ³ When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.

⁴ And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue." ⁶ 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. ⁷ Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.

⁸ 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."

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

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

Jesus Raises a Widow's Son

¹¹ Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. ¹² 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.

¹³ And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." ¹⁴ Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."

¹⁵ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. ¹⁶ Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" ¹⁷ And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

Messengers from John the Baptist

¹⁸ The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, ¹⁹ 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?"

²⁰ 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?' "

²¹ In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were

blind he bestowed sight. ²² 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. ²³ And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

²⁴ 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? ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

²⁷ This is he of whom it is written,

"Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you."

²⁸ 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 declared God just, having been baptised with the

baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptised 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 sinners!' ³⁵ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children."

I'm going to begin with the punch-line today, "²³**blessed is the one who is not offended by me.**" Jesus said that (not me – lots of people will be offended by me and there's no real blessing for being offended or not being offended by me – I'm of no account...)

But “blessed is the one who is not offended by Jesus”. Every single person must decide for themselves, “Who Jesus is”. And they have to decide for themselves, “How they are going to respond to Jesus (**Because** of Who He is).”.

Why is it that 50 people might hear the same Gospel message, and one person out of that 50 might respond in faith to Jesus Christ and be born again, into the Kingdom of God and receive eternal blessings? And the other 49 — nothing???

Why is it that the Word of God can be preached, and for some it warms their heart, while others are deeply offended and nowadays they take to the Twittersphere and gripe and groan about the deep offense they’ve suffered at the words of some wretched preacher??? And everybody else can re-twit and go “Oh you poor poor person” ...

But, what **does** it mean to be blessed by **not** being offended by Jesus? Well, there’s a few key phrases we’re going to focus on today, that lead us to the answer.

The first phrase, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.”

Jesus said that, about the most unlikely person – a Roman Centurion (of all people).

In a Roman Legion, the rank of “Centurion” was about as high as the equivalent of our non-commissioned officers could get. These were fighting men who had risen through the ranks. They weren’t the high-born elite, were doing a stint the military to build their political status – they were front-line career soldiers.

Under a Centurion, was an Optio (their 2nd in Command) and 80 Legionaries (the foot soldiers)

Simon Scarrow says this:

Sixty centurions provided the disciplinary and training back-bone of the legion. They were hand-picked for their command qualities and a willingness to fight to the death. Accordingly their casualty rate far exceeded other ranks.

Alright, so a Centurion was a hard fighting man, in charge of other fighting men, and he would lead from the front. And this Centurion had a servant/slave who was dying, and he valued him. And when he heard about Jesus, he asked if Jesus could come and heal him.

But the strange thing is, he managed to get some Jewish elders to ask Jesus on his behalf. (highly unusual). The Jews hated the Romans – they were their oppressors. But there was something very different about this bloke.

I suspect he was probably what we know as a “God-fearer” – a Gentile (non-Jew) who was embracing God and following the teachings of the Law and would go along to the Synagogue, but hadn’t yet fully committed to becoming a full Jew by getting circumcised and what-not.

And so, the Jewish elders told Jesus, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue."

And so Jesus agrees to go, but before He gets to the Centurion's house, the Centurion sends some friends with a message:

- Lord, do not trouble yourself
- I'm not worthy for You to come under my roof;
- That's why I haven't come myself – because I know I'm not worthy;
- But I **do** understand authority.
 - I have commanders, who are over me;
 - I command men under me.

And in a Roman Legion, when a command was given, it had to be obeyed (immediately, without question).

And so the Centurion said,

- "You don't need to come. You have authority. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed."

And when you and I, understand the authority that Jesus has, it will change:

- the whole way we respond to Him;
- the way we pray;
- how we obey/disobey;

it will even change

- how loosely we hold onto this life, because Jesus has full authority over life and death.
- When we recognise the authority of Jesus, our faith will increase exponentially.

And when Jesus heard the Centurion's message, He was amazed. And He turned to the crowd – this was a teaching opportunity that shouldn't be missed – **"I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."**

And **that**, is what Jesus is looking for – faith. The faith of those who recognise who Jesus is, and the authority that He holds...

And when the messengers returned home, the servant was well.

The **Second statement**, is the confession of the crowds, **"God has visited his people!"**

As they came near to a little town called "Nain" (not far from Jesus' home-town of Nazareth), they came to a funeral procession – a woman who had already lost her husband, had now lost her only son. And Jesus had compassion, and so He touched the bier (like a stretcher they would carry the body on). And they all stopped. And Jesus told the young man to get up. ¹⁵ **And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.**

Now, understandably, that didn't go unnoticed. ¹⁶ **Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A**

great prophet has arisen among us!" ... and ... "God has visited his people!"

We all have to decide who Jesus is... Planet Earth was visited by God in our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came to show us the way to salvation and life. And the only way to the Kingdom of God is through His Son...

The Third statement,²³ ...blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

John the Baptist, at this stage, is most probably in prison, and before long, will be beheaded...

But when the disciples of John the Baptist, brought to him, news of the healings and the resurrection of the widow's son and the testimony of the crowds, "God has visited his people!", he sent two of his disciples to Jesus with a question, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

You see, John the Baptist came as the greatest of prophets. John was paving the way for the coming Messiah. But the message that God had given John to preach, didn't fully line up with what John was hearing about Jesus...

John had preached about the wrath that was to come (3:7) and how the axe was ready to cut at the root of every bad tree

(3:8). And he had prophesied of the coming Christ, ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

(This is the picture of judgment)...

But Jesus wasn't judging – He was acting with grace and mercy.

You see, the prophesy of John was looking forward to the 2nd coming of Jesus. When Jesus returns:

- He **will** be coming in judgment;
- He **will** be separating the wheat from the chaff;
- there **will** be an unquenchable fire for all who reject Him....

But the plan of God, was for John to prepare Israel for the **first** coming of Jesus by telling them about the 2nd.. Jesus came to planet Earth as the Saviour of the world. Jesus came to reconcile humanity to Himself... But who wants a Saviour, if they don't know they need saving. And that's where the message of John the Baptist comes in.

And so, how we respond to the message of John the Baptist, will determine how we respond to Jesus... The message of John, heightens our awareness of sin. And it reveals the consequences of our sin; and our **need** of repentance and our **need** to be saved from sin. **Judgment is coming**. God will not let evil go unpunished – that would be unjust...

Judgment day will come. *It's like a very naughty boy hearing his mother say, "You just wait until your father gets home".*
Judgment may be delayed, but justice will be served.

And because all have sinned and all are deserving of death, there's good news, that we have a Saviour. In Jesus Christ (the Messiah) there is grace. There is opportunity for repentance and there **is** forgiveness of sins.

And so, if I'm convinced by the message of John the Baptist, I'm ready to hear the Gospel of Jesus. "Oh, thank you Jesus. Thank You for Your sacrifice on the cross, and for forgiveness in Your Name."

But if I reject the message of John the Baptist and if I **don't** recognise my sin and I **don't** admit to my dire need to be saved, then the Gospel is somewhat offensive. ("What do you mean, 'I'm a sinner???'")

And those who reject Jesus, do so, because Jesus and everything He achieved on the cross, is offensive to their prideful selves.

And so Jesus said to the Disciples of John, [You go back] "...
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.

23 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

The evidence was insurmountable. This is entirely the activity of God. **Of course** Jesus is the one he was waiting for. No need to look elsewhere – you just need to see the big picture.

The Fourth statement, is **Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."**

After John's disciples had left, Jesus had a word to the crowds about John. John wasn't a nobody – he was a prophet of God. And he didn't find his worth in luxuries – he lived rough and ate rough... He was the one preparing the way for the Messiah.

And Jesus makes a pretty big call:

28 I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John.

He was a greater prophet than any that had come before him... But here comes an even bigger statement: **Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."**

You see, John was still searching. John had not yet made up his mind about who Jesus is. And indecision is something that excludes us from the Kingdom of God...

And you might be listening to this today, and you're interested in Jesus, but you're still undecided... And you're right to decide carefully, because this is the biggest decision you're ever going to make in your life.

Some preachers will totally downplay what it means for you to become a Christian. And basically their message becomes something like “just add a bit of Jesus to your life and everything will be good.” I'm not going to lie to you like that.

Jesus was up-front about the cost of being His disciple: Becoming a Christian means putting to death the old person and becoming a completely new creation. And being a Christian isn't a bed of roses – it's a cross of nails...

It's a big deal becoming a Christian. It's not for the weak – in Christ we have to be strong to follow Him...

So, if you're undecided about who Jesus is, I understand why you haven't made the decision to follow Him... But I'm also pretty sure that God is speaking to you today, and you're no longer undecided. You do know:

- Jesus **is** the Christ;
- the Son of God;
- the Saviour of the world;
- the one who is returning to judge the living and the dead...

And if you know that, then don't delay – decide right now – “I **am** going to follow Jesus.”

Repent of sin, and find grace and forgiveness and new life in Him.

The day of decision is here. And if you have decided to commit whole-heartedly to the Lord Jesus, well, welcome to the Kingdom of God.

The Fifth statement,³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptised by him.)

When John the Baptist preached God's call to repentance, there was one group who went along for a look, but didn't respond – the Pharisees and the Lawyers (scribes)... They were pretty confident that they had their own righteousness in hand – in their mind, they didn't need to repent/be baptised...

They were wrong. This is the purpose of God – to repent (of which baptism is a symbol), and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ...

Do you notice: There in V30, they **rejected the purpose of God for themselves???** Some folk will talk about something they call “irresistible grace”, and their view is that if God calls you, there's no way you can resist Him, and so if someone doesn't believe, it just means that God hasn't called them... But you know what? I see in the Scriptures (over and over again), people who **are** being called by God – being called to repentance and to believe in Him,, and yet, they **do** resist Him...

And that's what happened here. They rejected John's call to repentance, and they rejected Jesus... They were resisting the purpose of God.

And as you and I share our faith with others, some will come up with all sorts of reasons as to why they won't follow Jesus, and in their own mind, they'll convince themselves that it's a valid reason – but it's only an excuse.

Jesus likens them to petulant children who refuse to join in and play with the other kids. We played a happy tune, but you wouldn't dance; we sang a sad song, but you wouldn't cry... Some folk just always have an excuse...

They wouldn't listen to John the Baptist because he wouldn't eat bread or drink wine – and he's no good... Whereas Jesus came, and He ate and he drank, but: **'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'**

And so we come to the final statement - the **Sixth statement**,
³⁵ **Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.**"

Every one of us have a decision to make: Who is Jesus? And if Jesus truly is the one He claims to be (the Christ, the Son of God), then it's well worth leaving everything to follow Him.

By faith, even the most wicked sinner is saved to the Kingdom of God.

Now, I don't know why God loves us so much, that He sent His only Son to die for us... I can't tell you why He did that,,,. Except for the Love of God, and the Wisdom of God.

God's plan – God's purpose, is for us to turn toward Him with our whole hearts... And the Wisdom of God in sending His Son is justified, by all His children.

When you do make that step, and decide, “Yes, I will become a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ!”,,, there is no doubt – many will think that strange/weird/naive,, but don't ever forget, as a Christian, you will be in good company. **wisdom is justified by all her children.**

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus,
we thank You that You came as Saviour of the world.
God has visited his people!

Lord,
we recognise that You are the Saviour
– the Saviour whom we need
And as we hear Your call to repentance,

may we never be offended.

But give us faith.

Help us to know Your authority
over all things,
and increase our faith.

Lord,

We thank You for the blessing that it is
that You have brought us into the Kingdom of God.

And may we never reject the purpose that You have for
us.

May Your wisdom and Your glory,
be seen by the world,
even in us.

Amen.