

Week of February 6 - 12

The Centurion's Servant Healed (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10)

When Jesus returned to Capernaum, a Roman army captain asked some Jews to forward his request to heal one of his servants, who was paralyzed and in pain near death. Because the officer had shown friendliness for the Jews and built a synagogue for them, the Jews asked Jesus to heal the servant. On the way, Jesus was intercepted by the officer who said, "You don't need to come since you can simply issue the command and my servant will be healed. I have authority over many soldiers. Just say the word and I know it will be done.

Jesus was astounded and said to the crowd, "I haven't found such faith in all Israel. Many will come from all over the world and sit in heaven with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but many Jews will be relegated to empty darkness, gritting their teeth and weeping. Jesus told the officer to go home, and his expectation would be met. When the officer arrived home, his servant was healed.

The Raising of the Widow's Son (Luke 7:11-17)

The next day as they traveled to Nain with a large crowd, they met a funeral procession near the city gate for the only son of a widow. When Jesus met her, he had pity and told her not to cry. Then he stopped the procession, waked up to the casket, and put his hand on it, saying, "Get up, young man!" The crowd was dumbfounded when the boy sat up and talked.

Jesus gave the boy to his mother, and everyone praised God, saying, "A prophet has come to us. God has appeared to us!" Jesus' popularity grew throughout Judea and the surrounding area.

Tribute to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:2-19, 25-30; Luke 7:12-35)

Some of John's followers visited him in jail and told them what Jesus was doing. John sent two of them back to ask Jesus if he was indeed the Savior who would redeem his people or if someone else would be coming later. When the followers found Jesus healing diseases, expelling evil spirits, and restoring sight to the blind, they explained that John the Baptist had sent them to find out if he was the Savior or should they expect someone else to follow.

"Go back and tell John what you are seeing and hearing," Jesus responded, "The blind see and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are revived. Blessed is he one who does not lose his faith in me.

When they left, Jesus said, "Why did you go out to the wilderness? What did you expect to find? A wildflower being blown by the wind? A nobleman dressed in silk? Those who live delicately and wear gorgeous clothes belong in castles. Were you looking for a prophet? The one of whom it is written, 'Behold I send my messenger to prepare your way.' John the Baptist is as important as anyone who has ever been born on Earth. Yet, the most insignificant human in heaven is greater than John."

"Since John arrived until now, the kingdom has been in turmoil and under attack. Pay attention! Everything in the Old Testament pointed to him. If you can handle this, he is Elijah who was to return."

John's followers felt reassured, but many Pharisees and priests rejected His counsel and refused to acknowledge John's baptism. Jesus thought aloud, "To whom can I compare these religious

leaders? They're like children at a park whining because they didn't dance with them when they sang, or cry when they pouted. John didn't eat bread or drink wine, and you say something is wrong with him; he's crazy. But I eat food and drink wine and you say, 'What a glutton Jesus is! He drinks and his friends are outcasts and sinners. The path of wisdom is always eventually proved by its results.'

Then Jesus looked up and said, "Thank you, Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, for concealing these great truths from those who think they are wise, and for revealing it to little children."

Returning his attention to those with him, he continued, "My father has entrusted me with everything. Only He knows the Son, and only the Son knows Him besides those I introduce to Him. Come to me if you are under a heavy yoke and I will give you rest. Wear my yoke and let me teach you; I am gentle and humble, and you will find my yoke is easy.

Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman (Luke 7-36-50)

A Pharisee proposed they continue their discussion over dinner, so Jesus agreed to join them. A woman with a bad reputation slipped in with an alabaster vial filled with expensive ointment, approached Jesus, and began washing his feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair. Then she kissed his feet and applied the ointment to them. The host thought that if this man were a prophet, he would avoid the woman and not let her touch him.

Jesus asked Simon a question, "A man loaned money to two people - \$5,000 to one and \$500 to the other. Neither man could repay him, so he forgave them both, letting them keep the money. Which man do you think loved him the most after that?" "The one who owed him the most," Simon responded. "Correct," Jesus agreed.

Then he looked at the woman and said, "Simon, when I came to your house, you offered nothing for me to clean my feet. But this woman has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss. But since I got here, she hasn't stopped kissing my feet. You didn't anoint my head with oil, but this woman used her expensive ointment to anoint my feet. She shows much love knowing that much has been forgiven. Those who are forgiven little, show little love."

Jesus told the woman her sins were forgiven. Those at the dinner perked up and thought, "Who does he think he is excusing people of their sins?"

Jesus told the woman to go in peace because her faith had saved her.

Jesus and Beelzebub (Matthew 12:22-50, 46-50; Mark 3:22-35; Luke 8:21, 11:14-36)

The crowds grew so large they didn't have time to eat. A blind and dumb man was brought for healing, and Jesus healed him. "Maybe this is the Messiah," the crowds exclaimed.

Jesus' family and friends were trying to warn him that the priests were claiming he was out of his mind, telling people he was casting out evil with satanic spells under the influence of the devil himself. Others wanted proof from Heaven.

His mother and brothers arrived, but couldn't get through the crowds to him. They asked some to get word to him they needed to talk to him. He responded, "Have you met my family? Those who hear and obey my Father's will are my closest kin.

“Blessed is the woman who gave birth to such a man,” yelled a woman in the crowd.

“Even more blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it,” Jesus responded. “Any kingdom at odds with itself will destroy itself. Opposing forces will fall. If Satan casts out satanic forces, how can his kingdom survive? If I cast out evil by satanic power, they by what power do your religious leaders contend with evil? What is their standard? But if I can cast out evil by the hand of God, then surely the Kingdom of God is here.

“When a strong man guards his house, his property is secure. No one can enter and take his possessions unless he first overtakes him and binds him. If you don't join me, you're getting in my way, hampering my cause.

“Even blasphemy against me or any other sin can be forgiven – all except one: speaking against the Holy Spirit shall never be forgiven, either in this world or the world to come.

“If you are ready good, you will do what is right. If you are bad, you will do what is bad. Its fruit can identify a tree. You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? A man's heart determines his speech. A good man's speech reveals rich treasures. An evil-hearted man is filled with venom and his speech reveals it. On judgment day, every man will give an account of every idle word he ever spoke. You will either be condemned or justified by your own words.”

Some of the religious leaders still taunted him, insisting on proof of his divine authority. Jesus told them the only sign they would get out of him was what happened to Jonah the prophet: three days and nights in the heart of the earth. The Ninevites will be held up to condemn this generation because they repented when Jonah preached, but a greater authority is here with you. The queen of Sheba will also condemn this generation because she traveled a long way to hear Solomon's wisdom, yet someone wiser than Solomon is here with you.

“This evil nation is like a man possessed by a demon. When the demon leaves, it goes to the desert for a while, seeking rest but finding none. Then it decides to return to the man it came from because the man's heart is clean but empty. Then it invites seven more spirits more evil, and all of them enter the man and live in him. He ends up worse off than before.”