

## Luke 7 Expectations of Faith

During Jesus' time on earth, He had several objectives. Just to name a few, He set about to accomplish all the things that had been predicted about the Messiah by the prophets; He demonstrated how godly character operates in a broken world; and He set Himself up to be the one perfect sacrifice by which the debts to justice of all people of all time were paid off. In Luke 7, He was working on the first two: matching the predictions of the prophets and demonstrating godly character. We can learn from His character and His faith. What should godly character look like in our messed up world? How should our faith be manifested in us? Chapter 7 gives us four examples after which we may pattern our faith. Since this is a long chapter, we will get right to it.

In the story of "Healing the Centurion's Servant," we can see that the faithful look for others with similar faith (7:1 – 10)

*Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, "for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue." Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. Therefore, I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, having 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." When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well.*

Jewish people in general in the first century were taught from childhood to be arrogant toward people of other ethnic groups. Further, the general feeling was that the works of the Law yielded personal benefits, rather than national benefits. So, the elders of the Jews were condescending in their recommendation that Jesus heal the centurion's servant, and asserted that the centurion was deserving, which we see as an odd way to deal with God.

In verse 9, Jesus used the word "found," implying that He had been looking for such faith. So, even though this centurion was not of the "lost sheep of Israel," as Jesus had defined His target audience (Matthew 10:5 – 6, 15:24), He marveled at the centurion's faith and made a public announcement about it. His goal was to develop fledgling faith wherever He was. He was not about finding the "deserving" or the "obedient," but those who trusted that God could and would meet this need.

How can we go about imitating Jesus' godly character such as He demonstrated in this short report?

Do we marvel and comment when faith comes to the surface? Of course, before someone can act in faith, that person must know what promises God has made, and which promises were

made up by religious leaders. And, we need to know the same before we can determine which is faith and which is tradition, which is selfless and which is self-serving.

But when we see it, do we comment?

Many people have been taught that they should preface announcements about their choices with something like “God has moved me to...” which is entirely self-serving and unprovable. Biblical faith is about our serving of others. And, Biblical faith is focused on the promises of God, not what I want to see happen or how I think God is supposed to respond. If we have no physical evidence that God did something, we need to be comfortable not knowing. We walk by faith, not by sight.

Instead of touting God’s effect on me, we should be telling those in whom we see great faith emerging that we are seeing it in them. It is very hard to see faith growing in yourself. We tend to doubt ourselves. John, in 1 John 3:18 – 19 and 4:12 – 13, told us how we should know, but humble people tend to discount themselves. So, one of the purposes of the church is to tell each other when we see that faith in them.

But Jesus was not just all about doing the right thing, being our example of faith in a broken world, but also He was about compassion, about doing what was needed in the moment, in verses 11 – 17.

*Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain [about 25 miles SSW of Capernaum, probably closer to 30 miles by road]; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man 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. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has risen up among us”; and, “God has visited His people.” And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.*

This widow, in addition to her grief, was also watching the end of her husband’s line, there being no more male heirs. If she were not independently wealthy, which would be unlikely, she would need to go back to her father’s household or to that of her eldest brother. Either way, she knew that she was about to become a burden to someone.

Jesus’ motivation was compassion, not to make a point or to gather a crowd. Further, there were rules about touching dead bodies, or other things that had touched dead bodies, both of which made you unclean (Numbers 19: 11 – 22). Uncleanness was not a sin; it happened all the time. But an unclean person could not socialize or participate in Jewish rituals until that uncleanness was rectified through its own ritual. Of course, different groups taught different degrees of separation from a dead body which could make you unclean. For example, most taught that touching the coffin, not just the body itself, made one unclean because the dead body was in it. Others said the stone bench upon which the body would be laid would also become unclean. But the stone bench had been carved from the rock of the tomb, so maybe the floor and walls of the cave were unclean. Some expanded the sphere of uncleanness to the outside of the tomb. Taken to its logical extreme, that would make the whole world unclean.

Jesus did not address the theological ramifications; He just acted with compassion.

This was not the first resurrection in the Bible: the son of the widow of Zarephath by Elijah (1 Kings 17:17 – 24); the Shunammite woman’s son by Elisha (2 Kings 4), and the dead man whose corpse touched the dead bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:20 – 21). All of these stories prepared the way for Israelites to gain the understanding that death is not necessarily permanent.

So, aside from the compassion of Jesus, which may have some impact on how we view ourselves and how God could ever accept us again, trust us again, what should it mean to us that Jesus did this?

Do we find ourselves sometimes acting just on compassion? Is our compassion limited to those whom we think deserve our compassion? Is our compassion well integrated into our personalities, or is it something rare? Do we end up accomplishing the impossible through our compassion? How might that look?

First, remember that the indwelling Spirit is given to all the faithful. Through that Spirit, we gain the ability to be selfless, to have that selfless kind of love that 1 John describes. That same Spirit helps us overcome ourselves so that we can walk as He walked. Our overcoming and our selflessness are to be painfully visible to the outside world. They are proof that our message is true, that we work for the right guy.

In this scene about compassion, our compassion will not be exactly the same as this. But it should be just as remarkable to the observer, by which the observer comes to the conclusion that such behavior is beyond human capability, so they gain evidence that God is at work. I am not saying that you need to convert all your assets to cash and start throwing it at people. That is wasteful. As we will see in the next scene, Jesus expects us to think. How we display godly, miraculous compassion could take many forms. We could simply bring assets and people who are in need together – and not necessarily monetary assets, which have a poor track record of actually solving problems. Rather, we can bring people together with others who are likely to expand their horizons, give them a purpose in life, or make them taste a little success at something. Compassion is addressing the misery of another, it is not a way to start a Bible study, although such a study may pop up later as a result. There is no formula for compassion. Just go with your gut. If you see an opportunity and a creative way to address that opportunity, just do it and let the chips fall where they may.

And notice what happened in the scene. Jesus’ act of compassion caused the gospel to expand much faster.

As we move through the chapter, Luke’s next scene involves the disciples of John the Baptist in which Jesus demonstrated that He expects people to think, to have some discernment based on the descriptions in the Scriptures (7:18 – 35).

*Then the disciples of John reported to him concerning all these things. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to Jesus, saying, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” When the men had come to Him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, ‘Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?’” And that very hour He cured many of infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many blind He gave sight. Jesus answered and said to them, “Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.” When the messengers of John had departed, He began to speak to the multitudes concerning John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who are gorgeously appareled and live in*

*luxury are in kings' courts. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face who will prepare Your way before You.' For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him. And the Lord said, "To what then shall I liken the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another, saying: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not weep.' For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by all her children."*

Jesus expected His audience to make logical deductions based on the evidence at hand, both from the Scriptures and through logic, and not to be diverted by the illogic of others. At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was baptized by John (John 1:29 – 36) and John began announcing publicly that Jesus was that promised Messiah. Whether John had begun to doubt his own conclusions or just got tired of answering the same question again and again is unknown. But, John wanted to settle the matter, so he sent two of his disciples to ask one last time. Jesus responded by citing what He had been doing and expecting them to make a connection with the descriptions of the Messiah found in Isaiah 35:5 – 6 and 61:1 – 3. He could have given them a theological treatise about the Messiah and put Himself into it, but instead He just did the things that Isaiah had predicted. The plain evidence was supposed to overcome their hesitance.

Further, rather than focusing on the doubt, Jesus praised John and his work, that he was greatest among the prophets, unique. Jesus focused on what John had gotten right, not what he or his followers had missed. This method strengthened those had been trusting John's message already. And, of course, this praise of John further alienated those who had no interest in this poorly dressed, confrontational rabble-rouser.

Where do we fit into this picture? When we get confused, do we turn to the simplicity of the story, or to complex theology? The gospels describe how godly character works in this broken world. The letters (Romans through Jude) describe how we allow our baggage and our culture to mess that up, and how to weed such customs out of the church experience. Keep it simple

A review of God's evidence and God's promises cut through cloudy or complex thinking. Physical evidence is the first and most important characteristic of Biblical faith. Paul wrote that in 1 Corinthians 15:1 – 8. Reviewing the evidence and the promises maintains the connection to what is important.

Pointing out the good efforts and ideas of others brings people together. Evaluate everything, keep the good stuff (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Why talk about what has been discarded?

Don't be afraid that you might offend someone with evidence. They will be offended at anything because that is their nature. Be kind, gentle, patient, and gracious. Then you know the offense was not because you were obnoxious.

Neither listen to fault-finders nor be one.

Weaknesses in doctrine create potential structural failures (1 Corinthians 3:10 – 15). So, patching up those holes is important. Trust God to work out the differences (Philippians 2:13, 3:15).

Jesus' response to these disciples of John is not so much about making Jesus' case for being the Messiah. He had already done that and would do it again. The important part was the way He did it, which is something we can emulate.

Moving along to the fourth and last example of the expectations of faith, we have the scene in which a woman of ill-repute somehow gained admission to the home of a Pharisee and anointed Jesus' feet (7:36 – 50), and Jesus demonstrated the nature of godly forgiveness. A small language note: forgiveness in the Hebrew culture was a figure of speech. Literally, the word mean "to push aside." It is used many places in the New Testament in that way, like when Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John. The text says, "They pushed aside their nets (which they were mending at the time) and followed Him." But, when used figuratively, it means to push aside the past and its well-earned distrust, and to trust the other person again. So, here it is:

*Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner; when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Then He said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."*

Not all Pharisees were equally embittered against Jesus. Some, like Nicodemus (John 3:1 – 2), wanted more information, hence, the invitation. This woman, labelled a sinner, may have been a prostitute, but also may have been involved in some other illegal activity like smuggling. Whatever her trouble, everyone knew about it, which also explains why she could afford a flask of very expensive oil, probably equal to a year's wages for a laborer. She would be able to get into the dinner because of the way the rich people hosted such gatherings, generally in their open courtyard, completely visible to those who passed the gate to the street, a means of showing off. The woman could have just drifted in, and the servants would be hesitant to challenge her for fear of a scene with a disreputable person.

Also, strangely, Simon, the host, while treating Jesus as an important person, kept social control by not having a servant wash Jesus' feet.

The woman's behavior made it clear that she felt that Jesus was responsible for a big change in her life. As the scene unfolds, we learn that she either felt forgiven by God due to something Jesus said or did, or she was seeking that forgiveness. Do you think she was crying out of sorrow or out of joy?

Simon, the Pharisee and host, incorrectly assumed that a prophet would (1) know everything and (2) would avoid contact with all undesirables.

Imagine having such thoughts and having another person comment on those thoughts. Kind of creepy.

In the parable Jesus told, note that the two examples loved because they were forgiven, not forgiven because they loved.

I'm sure that Simon caught on to the implication that the reason he, Simon, had not taken the plunge and become totally committed to Jesus was because he did not think he had all that much to forgive, whereas the woman was not similarly self-deceived, and responded to Jesus much more appropriately.

So what's the application for us? How does this help to shape our expectations of faith?

Do we understand our own shortcomings? We do not need to magnify small inadequacies in ourselves. The general definition of forgiveness implies that God, despite our repeated failures in the past, promises to push aside our well-earned untrustworthiness. Secondly, focusing on how bad we are focuses on failure, leaving nothing about which to rejoice. Instead, we need to rejoice in the forgiveness, rejoice in being given a clean slate upon which to build a new relationship. The point is not to feel guilty or unworthy. The choice to forgive was God's, not ours. Our job is to respond appropriately, and the appropriate response is joy, not guilt or remorse.

For a lot of people, accepting forgiveness is difficult. I think it arises from that self-deprecating mindset that is taught in so many churches. But remember, continued feelings of guilt is actually distrust of God.

Up until the last week or so of Jesus' life, He was demonstrating how godly character works for a human in this world. Right at the end, Jesus focused a lot more on the redemption angle, but here He was re-orienting our expectations.

What are God's expectations of our faith? This chapter illustrates some of the ways that faith should play out: by seeking out and commenting on and relating to other people whose faith shows itself in remarkable ways. By reacting to difficult situations with compassion, not just marking out the things we need to do to be counted acceptable. God expects us to be discerning, to know the information He has left for us in the Scriptures, and to draw logical conclusions from it. And, to respond appropriately to God's forgiveness, of His offer to push our pasts out of the line of sight for the purpose of rebuilding a relationship. Church is not about doing certain rituals and being moral and ethical. It's about faith, and how that faith plays out despite the lack of people in this world who are going the same direction and despite the fact that other people don't understand you. A life full of faith is joyous and fulfilling, defeating anxiety and disappointment.