

Matthew 8; Mark 2-4; Luke 7 – Ep 192: CFM

Luke 7.1-10; Matt. 8.1, 5-13: Jesus heals the Centurion's Servant in Capernaum

1. A centurion in Capernaum and his sick servant (Luke 7.1-2).¹
2. "He loveth our nation, and he has built us a synagogue" (Luke 7.5).²
3. "I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof" (Luke 7.6).³
4. The Roman says, "say the word, and I know he will be healed," essentially as he would as if he were in command of his men. Jesus responds that this man has great faith. (Luke 7.7-9).⁴
5. The man was made whole (Luke 7.10).
 - a. Jesus chose this ideal occasion to show that his kingdom was not confined to any one race, but his power unto salvation was for the righteous and faithful of all nations.⁵

Luke 7.11-17: The Widow of Nain's son is raised from the dead

1. Location of Nain: Luke establishes the scene by identifying its location, the audience for the encounter to come, and the state of the woman who will occupy center stage in this episode. Nain is a Galilean town located some 25 miles southwest of Capernaum and six miles to the southeast of Nazareth; Luke refers to it as a city, though he goes on to present a village-like atmosphere, with community mourning of the widow's loss.⁶

¹ The nearest Roman legion was stationed in Syria, but many auxiliaries, mostly recruited from Syria, were also stationed at Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, with some in the Fortress Antonia in Jerusalem. They were not bound to their camps at all times, however, and after retirement some probably settled at various places in Palestine. Centurions commanded a "century" (i.e., 100), which in practice consisted of sixty to eighty troops. Centurions were the backbone of the Roman army, in charge of discipline. An inexpensive slave might cost a third of a soldier's pay for a year, but centurions were paid far more. Craig Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary](#), IVP Academic, 2014, p. 197.

² . Non-Jews who feared God and donated substantial sums to the Jewish community were well respected. Those requesting help often sought someone respected by the benefactor to intercede on the requester's behalf. (This centurion may have also been able to intercede for their town with higher Roman officials if necessary.) **Ancient Mediterranean culture stressed reciprocity**; the elders now intercede on his behalf. Centurions' salaries were roughly sixteen to seventeen times those of their troops (perhaps thirty to sixty times for the highest ranking centurions), but for this centurion to have built the local *synagogue might nevertheless represent years of savings. Keener, p. 197.

³ The centurion was not a full convert to Judaism and thus retained some of his uncleanness as a Gentile, especially in regard to the food in his home. To invite a Jewish teacher into such a home would have been offensive under normal circumstances, but in this case the community's elders want to make an exception (7:3), presumably because this Gentile home is not defiled by idolatry. Keener, p. 197. οὐ γὰρ εἶμι **ἰκανός** ἵνα ὑπὸ τὴν στέγην μου εἰσέλθῃς "For I am not **competent/enough** in order that you should enter under my roof" (Luke 7.6, final bit. The verb εἰσέλθῃς here is in the subjunctive, a prohibition the soldier gives to the Savior).

⁴ The word of Jesus, given unseen and from a distance, can deliver the precious servant from his illness. It is a profound insight that the centurion possesses and expresses: even though physically absent, Jesus can show his presence effectively. The lesson is a key one for Luke's readers, who no longer have Jesus' physical, visible presence. Darrell L. Bock, [Luke 1.1-9.50, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament](#), Baker Academic, p. 1588, electronic version.

⁵ Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, eds., [Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels](#), Deseret Book, 1986, p. 218.

⁶ Joel Green, [The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament](#), Eerdmans, 1997, p. 464 electronic version.

- a. This story may have been used by Luke to point us to the story of Elijah and the widow, as contained in 1 Kings 17.8-24.⁷
2. “The only son of his mother, and she was a widow” (Luke 7.12).
3. He had compassion on her (Luke 7.13).
 - a. “When the Lord saw here” (Luke 7.13). Jesus approaches the procession from the front and approaches the widow.
 - b. This woman is in a state of extreme vulnerability, due to her status as a widow without a son.⁸
 - i. Israelite law dictated that a widow did not inherit anything from her husband’s estate. Only her children do, although that restriction would change in two generations from this event.⁹
4. Jesus raises the young man from the dead (Luke 7.14-15).
5. Fear came upon the observers of the miracle (Luke 7.16).¹⁰
6. And this “rumor” of him went forth throughout all Judea (Luke 7.17). The text uses *logos* here, so another way to interpret this would be that this “word” or “story” of Jesus was spread throughout the land.

Cultural Implications

Interrupting a funeral was a blatant breach of Jewish law and custom; touching the bier exposed Jesus to a day’s uncleanness (Num 19:21-22); touching the corpse exposed him to a week’s uncleanness (cf. Num 5:2-3; 19:11-20). But in Jesus’ case, the influence goes in the other direction.¹¹

By touching even the bier, a stretcher on which the body was borne (Jewish custom did not use a closed coffin), Jesus would be viewed as contracting corpse-uncleanness, the severest form of ritual impurity in

⁷ It is still important to note that Nain and Zarephath are not the same location. Zarephath was a city north of Tyre in modern Lebanon, and Nain was in Galilee, about six miles southeast of Nazareth.

⁸ Most telling in Luke’s account is his portrayal of this woman’s catastrophic state. She is a widow who has lived since her husband’s death in relation to her only son, himself a young man. With his passing, she is relegated to a status of “dire vulnerability”—without a visible means of support and, certainly, deprived of her access to the larger community and any vestiges of social status within the village. Green, p. 465. People customarily dropped whatever they were doing and joined in the back of a funeral procession when it passed by. ***For a widow’s only son to die before she did was considered extremely tragic; it also left her dependent on public charity for support unless she had other means or relatives of means.*** Keener, p. 198, emphasis added.

⁹ S. Kent Brown, [*The Testimony of Luke, Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary*](#), BYU Studies, 2015, p. 365.

¹⁰ ἔλαβεν δὲ φόβος ἅπαντας, καὶ ἐδόξαζον τὸν θεὸν “And fear was seized by everyone, and they glorified God” (Luke 7.16a, my translation). The reaction to the display of God’s power yields the normal response of fear, φόβος (*phobos*). Luke often expresses the emotional reaction to God’s work in terms of awe and respect (Luke 1:65; 5:26; 8:25, 37; Acts 2:43; 5:5, 11; 19:17). Such respect for God’s work reflects an awareness of the event’s uniqueness and honors the majesty of the one who has worked. ***Though fear was present... the crowd responded first to acknowledge the healer and then to acknowledge the God who sent him. In recognizing such events, they glorified God***, another common Lucan description of a response to God’s activity (Luke 5:9, 26; 9:43; 13:13; 17:18; 18:43; 23:47). Bock, p. 1616-1617, emphasis added.

¹¹ Keener, p. 198.

Judaism (Num 19:11-20). Only those closest to the deceased were expected to expose themselves to this impurity.¹²

Luke 7.18-35; Matt. 11.2-19: John sends messengers to Jesus and Jesus testifies of John

1. John sends two of his disciples to Jesus, saying, "Are you he that should come?" (Luke 7.18-19).¹³
2. Jesus responds, "Go your way, and tell John what you have seen and heard: how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised, the gospel is preached to the poor!" (Luke 7.22).
3. John's messengers depart (Luke 7.24).
4. Jesus explains John's greatness as a prophet (Luke 7.24-35).
 - a. "Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist" (Luke 7.28).¹⁴
 - i. This is a coded statement.¹⁵

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Many Bible commentators have thought that John himself was wavering while in prison, wondering and even doubting whether Jesus was the Messiah, and therefore had sent these two disciples to enquire. That is not likely, however, since John knew by revelation who Jesus was." Robert J. Matthews, *Behold the Messiah*, Bookcraft, 1994, p. 49. The popular show *The Chosen* ([Season 3, episode 6: Intensity in Tent City, 47:30](#)) portrays this event as a time when even John the Baptist began to lack faith. Perhaps both readings may have some merit here.

¹⁴ Joseph Smith commented on this passage when he said:

"How is it that John was considered one of the greatest prophets? His miracles could not have constituted his greatness. First. He was entrusted with a divine mission of preparing the way before the face of the Lord. Whoever had such a trust committed to him before or since? No man. Secondly. He was entrusted with the important mission, and it was required at his hands, to baptize the Son of Man. Whoever had the honor of doing that? Whoever had so great a privilege and glory? Whoever led the Son of God into the waters of baptism, and had the privilege of beholding the Holy Ghost descend in the form of a dove, or rather in the sign of the dove, in witness of that administration? ... Thirdly. John, at that time, was the only legal administrator in the affairs of the kingdom there was then on the earth, and holding the keys of power. The Jews had to obey his instructions or be damned, by their own law; and Christ Himself fulfilled all righteousness in becoming obedient to the law which he had given to Moses on the mount, and thereby magnified it and made it honorable, instead of destroying it. ... These three reasons constitute him the greatest prophet born of a woman." [Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith, The Mission of John the Baptist, chapter 6.](#)

¹⁵ This passage is rich in meaning. Matthew quotes Malachi 3:1 to identify John the Baptist as a messenger, which in both Malachi's Hebrew (*malakh*) and Matthew's Greek (*angelos*) is an angel. In Hebrews 1:4, the Melchizedek priest Jesus is better than the *angeli*. The Baptist is specifically the angel who prepares the way, as in Isaiah 40. John "rises" because he is an angel-priest who ascends through the temple. **None "born of women" is greater than John the Baptist, which is strange if you think of Christ's mother as mortal Mary, but makes perfect sense when you see Christ as the Lord, the son of the Virgin in the Holy of Holies.** This understanding, in light of the first verses of John 1, also explains the statement that the "least in the kingdom of heaven" is greater than John. The occupants of the kingdom of heaven, which is the Holy of Holies (Matthew 7:21-23), are God upon his throne, the Virgin who is a lamp who is a tree, and the Son who is the Word. The least (*mikroteros*, 'smaller') of these is presumably the Son, and he is greater than John the Baptist (John 1:15). Why does the kingdom of heaven suffer violence? Because the false priests the evangelists call 'hypocrites' (a Greek word meaning 'actors') hold the Jerusalem temple, as Matthew says, "by force." John is Elias, a fact Matthew identifies as a mystery by saying "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear..." David Butler, [The Goodness and the Mysteries: On the Path of the Book of Mormon's Visionary Men](#), Create Space, 2012, p. 41-42.

- ii. “He that is least in the kingdom is greater than he” (Luke 7.28). Here Jesus is referring to himself.¹⁶
- b. John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say, “He hath a devil” (Luke 7.33).
- c. The Son of Man is come eating and drinking, and ye say “Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber!” (Luke 7.34).

Luke 7.36-50, 8.1-3: A Woman Anoints Jesus’ feet

Jesus violated social taboos to reach out to those marginalized not only culturally (7:1-10), economically (7:11-17) and religiously (7:24-35) but also morally (7:36-50). Since the classical Greek period, banquets had become an occasional setting for moral instruction.¹⁷

1. One of the pharisees desired him that he would eat with him (Luke 7.36).¹⁸
2. Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner (Luke 7.37).¹⁹
 - a. Other ways to view this woman: perhaps this is not as easy to classify as modern readers think. It was and is easy enough to dismiss such a person as immoral as well as unclean and deviant, without grappling with the social realities faced by a woman, perhaps a freedwoman, forced into the marketplace by her lack of attachment or identification with a man, who prostitutes herself in order to live according to one of the very few options available to her; or a woman or girl sold into prostitution by her parents on account of economic misfortune.²⁰ In short, this unnamed woman belongs to a category of persons who qualify as “the poor,” for whom Jesus has been anointed to bring good news (4:18–19; 7:22).²¹
 - b. This woman, if she was a prostitute, was in a form of extreme bondage. Jesus came to liberate the captive. All mankind, when facing the reality of our own mortality, are faced

¹⁶ How was the least in the kingdom of heaven greater than he? [See Luke 7:28.] “In reply I asked—Whom did Jesus have reference to as being the least? Jesus was looked upon as having the least claim in God’s kingdom, and [seemingly] was least entitled to their credulity as a prophet; as though He had said—‘He that is considered the least among you is greater than John—that is I myself.’” Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:260–61.

¹⁷ Keener, p. 199.

¹⁸ It was considered virtuous to invite a teacher over for dinner, especially if the teacher were from out of town or had just taught at the synagogue. That they are “reclining” rather than sitting indicates that they are using couches rather than chairs and that this is a banquet, perhaps in honor of the famous guest teacher. Keener, p. 199.

¹⁹ She is a sinner in the city—that is, a woman known in the city as a sinner. Undoubtedly, this characterization marks her as a prostitute by vocation... contagious in her impurity, and probably one who fraternizes with Gentiles for economic purposes. **What is she doing in this house?** Some interpreters have found her presence unobjectionable, noting that the doors of homes in a Palestinian village would be open with anyone welcome to come in, but this seems highly problematic in light of the issues of holiness and purity attached to Pharisaic meal practices. On the contrary, **she is present as an intruder, at least from one perspective.** Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, p. 487, emphasis added.

²⁰ Kathleen E. Corley, *Private Women Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition*, Hendrickson, 1993, p. 52, 124. See also: Luise Schottroff, *Let the Oppressed Go Free: Feminist Perspectives on the New Testament (Gender and the Biblical Tradition)*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1993, p. 151-152.

²¹ Green, p. 488.

with the fact that we are all in bondage to sin and death and have no way out except it were that a savior is provided to remedy this.²²

3. The woman washes Jesus' feet with her tears and kissed his feet (Luke 7.38).
4. "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, for she is a sinner" (Luke 7.39).²³
5. "I have somewhat to say unto thee" (Luke 7.40).²⁴
6. The story of the two debtors (Luke 7.41-43).
7. Seest thou this woman? (Luke 7.44).
8. Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace (Luke 7.45-50).

Matthew 8.18-22; Mark 3.31-35: Whoever does the will of God

Matthew 8.18-22: Let the dead bury their dead (Luke 9.59-60)

One of an eldest son's most basic responsibilities (in both Greek and Jewish cultures) was his father's burial; failure to meet this obligation could make one a social outcast in one's village. The initial burial took place shortly after a person's decease, however, and family members would not be outside talking with rabbis during the reclusive mourning period immediately following the death. Thus some argue that what is in view here instead is the secondary burial: a year after the first burial, after the flesh had rotted off the bones, the son would return to rebury the bones in a special box in a slot in the tomb's wall. The son in this narrative could thus be asking for as much as a year's delay. Others note that in some Semitic languages, "wait until I bury my father" is a way of asking for delay until one may complete one's filial obligations, even if the father is not yet dead.²⁵

Even on these interpretations, however, Jesus' demand that the son place him above the greatest responsibility a son had toward his father would have horrified hearers: in Jewish tradition, honoring father and mother was one of the greatest commandments (see, e.g., Josephus, *Apion* 2.206), and to follow Jesus at the expense of not burying one's father would have been viewed as dishonoring one's

²² We all want something desperately...We want the kingdom of God. We want to go home to our heavenly parents worthy and clean. But the horrible price-perfect performance-is hopelessly beyond our means. At some point in our spiritual progress, we realize what the full price of admission into that kingdom is, and we also realize that we cannot pay it. And then we despair... But only at this point, when we finally realize our inability to perfect and save ourselves, when we finally realize our truly desperate situation here in mortality and our need to be saved from it by some outside intervention-only then can we fully appreciate the One who comes to save." Stephen E. Robinson, *Believing Christ: The Parable of the Bicycle and Other Good News*. Deseret Book, 1992, p. 33.

²³ Adult women who were religious were expected to be married and thus would have their heads covered; a woman with her hair exposed to public view often would be considered promiscuous, at least by those with more conservative cultural values. That this woman wipes Jesus' feet with her hair would thus indicate not only her humility but also her marginal religious and social status, even had Jesus not been a prophet and had she not been known in the community's gossip. Keener, p. 199.

²⁴ "I have something to say" sometimes introduces blunt or harsh words in Middle Eastern idiom. Keener, p. 199.

²⁵ This seems to be how R.T. France interprets this passage. He writes, "If the father had just died, the son could hardly be out at the roadside with Jesus; his place was to be keeping vigil and preparing for the funeral. Rather, **to "bury one's father" is standard idiom for fulfilling one's filial responsibilities for the remainder of the father's lifetime, with no prospect of his imminent death.** This would then be a request for indefinite postponement of discipleship, likely to be for years rather than days. In that case Jesus' reply would be less immediately shocking—the man's proposed "discipleship" was apparently not very serious." R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 2007, electronic version, p. 331, emphasis added.

father (on the need to bury parents, cf. Tobit 4:3-4; 6:15; 4 Maccabees 16:11). While some sages demanded greater honor than parents, only God could take precedence over them to this degree (cf. Deut 13:6).²⁶

Foxes have holes

In this instance, Christ knew the character of the man, and, without wounding his feelings by curt rejection, pointed out the sacrifice required of one who would follow whithersoever the Lord went, saying: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." As Jesus had no fixed place of abode, but went wherever His duty called Him, so was it necessary that they who represented Him, men ordained or set apart to His service, be ready to deny themselves the enjoyment of their homes and the comfort of family associations, if the duties of their calling so demanded. We do not read that the aspiring scribe pressed his offer.²⁷

Mark 3.31-35: Behold my mother and my brethren! (Luke 8.19-21)

Jesus' statement about who is family is revolutionary. First, given the efforts that Mark has taken to suggest Jesus' exalted status and authority, to now show Jesus recognizing a large crowd as his family is quite extraordinary. Next, given the role of the biological family in this society, Jesus is presenting an absolutely revolutionary teaching. The passage does leave open the door to his biological family becoming part of his new family- he has not rejected them; he just can't welcome them into the new family until they do the will of God. Jesus isn't presented as being antifamily, but, when in conflict, doing the will of God supersedes obligation to biological family. It is important not to focus too much on the exclusion of his family (who, according to later tradition, did eventually come to believe in him (Acts 1.14) but on the inclusiveness that Jesus is offering to all people who want to follow him. Unstated here is the cost of discipleship- all of these people have left their families, including Jesus. The rupture of family relationships is the cost of doing the will of God by being with Jesus.²⁸

Matthew 8.23-27; Mark 4.35-41: Jesus stills the Sea (see also Luke 8.22-25)

Background

The Lake of Galilee, situated well below sea level in the steep-sided rift valley of the Jordan, is subject to sudden, violent squalls, and the resulting turbulence could be dangerous to a relatively broad and shallow boat such as the one found at Ginosar (its depth is only 1.25 meters). Jesus has taken the opportunity for a rest, since the boat is in the competent hands of the Galilean fishermen who are the only disciples so far identified (4:18-22); his continuing to sleep in such circumstances may be attributed to natural exhaustion as much as to supernatural confidence, but it provides the setting for a remarkable reversal of roles, in that the experienced fishermen appeal for help to a man who as far as we know had little experience of boats (Nazareth is up in the hill, a long day's walk from the lake).²⁹

Symbol

²⁶ Keener, p. 66.

²⁷ [Jesus the Christ](#), p. 149.

²⁸ Julie Smith, [The Gospel According to Mark, Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary](#), BYU Studies, 2018, p. 252.

²⁹ R.T. France, [The Gospel of Matthew](#), p. 335, electronic version.

In the Hebrew Bible, the sea is associated with chaos, and only God has the authority to control it (Genesis 8.1; Job 26.12; Ps. 104.3; 107.23; 107.23-29; Isaiah 50.2). In this story, Jesus is not simply performing the miracle of stilling the storm; he is being identified with the God of the Hebrew Bible. This suggestion gains power through the allusions to the book of Jonah.

Jesus is able to sleep through the storm. His position on the boat means that the storm does not threaten him. On a symbolic level, this can be read to imply that the storm of sin does not affect him. It is the disciples (symbolic of all humans threatened by sin) who ask Jesus to intervene to save them. While subtle, this story can be read as a component of Mark's Atonement theology: Jesus need not intervene for his own sake, but he does so to protect others.³⁰

³⁰ Julie Smith, *The Gospel According to Mark, Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary*, BYU Studies, 2018, p. 315-316.