
Day 300 - October 27

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE – 30 CE)

The Ministry Continues

Readings: *Matthew 8:5-13, 11:2-19, 12:22-50; Mark 3:20-35; Luke 7:1-50, 8:1-3 19-21, 11:14-32*

Reflections:

- The story of healing the centurion's servant has a number of lessons contained within it. First, the Elders of the Jews that come to advocate for the Centurion are motivated by selfish reasons. "...he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." Here we see that being religious does not make a person loving because religion is obsessed with the externals. Jesus still goes with them, no doubt because he knows the Father's plan. The Centurion demonstrates great trust in Jesus and humility by not wanting Jesus to even enter his house but asking him just to speak healing as he was confident that was all Jesus needed to do. Jesus then says something completely shocking and offensive to the Elders of the Jews with him. "I tell you, I have not found such great faith, even in Israel. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west (Gentiles) and will take their place at the feast with Abraham (the father of faith), Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Talk about a slap in the face to the Elders of the Jews. Jesus says that this Gentile captain of the enemy has greater faith than anyone in Israel and will be welcomed into the spiritual family of faith. He then heals the servant to validate his irreligious teaching. We shouldn't hate our enemies because we should recognize that God is at work in their hearts too.
- Jesus' raising of the widow's only son was a clear act of compassion. Within this culture, that woman would have no one to care for her. Her husband was dead and now her only son was dead. Jesus has compassion on her vulnerable state and raises her son to life. He models in this story the great mercy of God and his power over life and death. What is the conclusion? "God has come to help his people." Jesus is Emanuel, God with us.
- John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin wants reassurance that Jesus' is the Messiah. This is an interesting part of the story as John was one of the first ones to declare Jesus' as the Messiah. Most see this as John struggling with his own faith as he faces his own death. Jesus responds to John's request by simply giving examples of God at work through his life. He encourages John to not lose hope. When a person's heart has faith, the evidence of God at

work strengthens that faith. On the other hand, if a person does not have faith, the evidence of God does nothing to create faith. The Pharisees and religious leaders saw all of the miracles Jesus cites for John but still none of them believed. The miracles Jesus cites here align with Jesus' initial proclamation of himself as Messiah when he began his ministry by quoting Isaiah 61. Jesus then publically affirms John as a true prophet. Even though John had struggled and doubted, Jesus doesn't criticize him but rather affirms him as being the fulfillment of one of the prophecies of the Old Testament (Malachi 3:1). Jesus then makes another powerful statement that helps us understand the huge difference between the story of Israel (the story of what doesn't work) and the kingdom Jesus establishes (the story of what does work). Jesus says, "I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he." There is no overlap. The highest example of the old order is so completely surpassed that even the poorest, weakest example of the new order is still better. What encouragement to the poor, the weak, the prostitutes and the tax collectors! These people had obvious struggles but those struggles then become shining examples of God's lavish grace that in the end surpasses the righteousness of the religion. Luke actually affirms this in his account of the story. Matthew's account adds this point: "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it." Jesus uses military language even though his movement is a peace movement. This statement points toward the spiritual warfare, rather than physical warfare. Jesus is waging war on the effects of sin rather than on the enemies of Israel. He and those with him are forcefully taking back what was held by Satan, not land but human hearts.

- Jesus then calls the religious leaders to account for their perpetual rejection of God. They rejected John the Baptist who came as a supreme example of the Old Testament righteousness, prophetic humility, and piety (because he initiated an irreligious movement that competed with the Temple). They said John had a demon. Jesus comes to them as someone who parties and celebrates life among the sinners and he gains the reputation of "a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners'." Jesus then concludes, "But wisdom is proved right by all her children." In other words, the tree is known by its fruit. In this case, the children are all those who are being welcomed into a restored relationship with God. Jesus' thousands of followers who are being restored to a right relationship with God are evidence that God's wisdom is truly being revealed through his life and leadership.
- Jesus' life is one scandal after another. Jesus goes to a Pharisees home for dinner. Here we see that the religious leaders or at least some of them at first do want to associate with Jesus and determine if he is the Messiah. A sinful woman, most likely a prostitute, comes to Jesus and anoints his feet with expensive perfume. Is this perfume she used as a part of her sex trade? Did she purchase this perfume with the money she earned as a prostitute? She cries at his feet and wipes his feet with her hair. She is publically repenting and weeping for her sin. She then pours this perfume on Jesus' feet as a sign of blessing and love. Simon the Pharisee then says to himself that Jesus obviously is not a prophet because if he was, he

wouldn't want this sinful woman touching him. Here we see the obsession with ritual purity and the fear of becoming ritually unclean. Religious people are afraid to get dirty in the messiness of life. They are sterile and isolated as they refuse embracing those who have obvious sin and struggle. Jesus knows what is going on inside of this Pharisee and so tells a simple story of two men being released from debt, one is released from a small amount of debt and the other from a huge debt. Jesus then asks which one will love more? Obviously, the one with the greater debt. Here we see the reason why God so willingly forgives people who have made a major mess of their lives. It will inspire these people to truly understand God's heart of love and in return to respond with deep love and devotion. Sin is no problem for God. Being loveless is. Radical grace unleashes lifelong love. The Pharisee had failed to wash Jesus' feet when he entered the house and in his own subtle way had dishonored Jesus. This woman on the other hand had washed his feet with her tears and lavishly poured perfume on his feet. "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." Jesus then goes on to say to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you; go in peace." This statement obviously offends the religiously minded guests of the Pharisee as Jesus is doing what only God can do.

- Luke's account continues and explains how Jesus travelled around from town to town proclaiming this same message along with his disciples and a number of women who had been healed or delivered from demons. Jesus had displayed incredible grace to women and was actually including them in his band of disciples. Women were not received as disciples normally but Jesus is breaking down the gender barriers. We also see that these women were honored as also financially supporting Jesus' ministry. Now this is very unusual as most women in that culture who had no husband would not be well off. They could have been prostitutes that had made money and were now able to live off the income they had earned. This may be a statement of sacrificial giving out of their poverty much like the story of the widow who gives her two pennies to God. In either case, this is a powerful statement of God's grace for women and their deep love for Jesus.
- Jesus then enters another house to have a meal and is so squished by the crowds that they can't even stop to have a bite of food. They bring a demon possessed man who is both blind and unable to speak. Jesus heals the man and the religious leaders who are there declare that he is doing these miracles by the power of Satan. Jesus responds by stating, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand." Jesus points out how ridiculous their position is. Then he says three things: 1) "But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you"; 2) "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house"; 3) "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatter." Jesus is saying that he has brought the kingdom of God, he is robbing Satan's house of all the people Satan has bound up and held captive; and the religious leaders need to make a choice to either

join his movement and enter community or face the fact that they are opposing the work of God and will be scattered (or judged).

- Jesus then warns them of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. He declares that if people blaspheme against him they will be forgiven, but they will not be forgiven for blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. Many people have been afraid of this sin because it seems to be unforgivable. It seems in this context what Jesus is saying is that boldly declaring that the work of God through the Spirit is actually the work of Satan is a big deal and people should be afraid of judgment. In the book of Acts, Ananias and Sapphira sinned against the Holy Spirit by lying in their pride. They were struck dead and so I guess you could say they weren't forgiven. Having said this, this is a very severe example and it is given to us to serve as a warning. Don't mess with treating the Holy Spirit of God lightly. God is a holy God and we need to be careful not to take grace as a license to mock or accuse God's Spirit as doing the work of evil. This warning Jesus gives is both for that time as well as the "age to come" or the age of the Spirit (book of Acts onward) that will follow his ministry. This speaking against the Spirit flows right from the heart Jesus says and so he points out that we can know what is in a person's heart just by listening to what comes out of their mouths. Therefore the words we speak, whether they are words of grace and trust in God or words of unbelief and judgment, will determine our ultimate spiritual fate. Again, Jesus drives right to the heart and says that it is not by the strict observance of religious rituals that makes a person right with God. The issue is the heart and you can tell where a person's heart is at, not by their religious actions, but by what they say and what comes out of their hearts. Mark adds a key point to this story. "When his (that being Jesus') family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" At first Jesus' family do not support Jesus and think he is crazy. Again they may have been controlled by their own religious presuppositions. In any case, Jesus' brothers, particularly James and Jude will later become his followers after Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus will appear to his brother James and in turn, James will become a key leader in the church. For now, they just think Jesus is nuts.
- Even though Jesus is doing one miraculous sign after another, the religious leaders want another miraculous sign. Unbelief is a black hole. It is never converted to faith by miraculous signs. Faith flows from a submitted heart not a persuaded mind. Jesus doesn't play their game but calls them on their unbelief. Jesus prophesies his own death and resurrection and declares that the Gentiles will judge this generation of unbelieving Jewish religious leadership. He references both Nineveh and the Queen of the South as examples. He also declares himself as greater than Jonah and Solomon. All of these statements would have been shocking and highly offensive to the religious leaders. Jesus then explains why the religious leaders are so bound and captive. Jesus uses the illustration of a demonized man who has the spirit cast out and then gets his life in order but doesn't turn to God to be filled with God's presence. When the Spirit comes back, it brings seven spirits along and the man is infinitely in worse shape than when he started. Jesus is saying that the religious leaders are like this man. They had the work of the enemy removed from their lives and they

cleaned up their lifestyle but they didn't fill their lives with the presence of God. They were happy to be ritually clean but not spiritually filled with God. So as the enemy returns and takes over their religious lives, they are in a state way worse than if they had not been religiously cleaned up.

- Again a woman affirms Jesus by calling out a blessing on his mother. Jesus responds by saying, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it." In other words, it isn't being born in the right family that matters. It is doing what your heavenly Father asks you to do!"
- Jesus' mother and brothers now appear in the story and want to talk to Jesus (because they think he is crazy). Jesus' response? "Here are my mother and my brothers" as he points to his disciples. "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Notice that Jesus includes father, mother, brother and sister. In this way we see that Mary does not hold a special place as the Catholic religion has maintained. Only Jesus' father is unique. Also we see that to embrace Jesus' message and grace and to actually live it out is what makes us members of his household, members of his family. All are welcomed into this one global family under one loving, heavenly father.
- Jesus' uses the illustration of a lamp and light to help people grasp the need for inner righteousness rather than simply outer religious righteousness. Israel had been called to be a light to the Gentiles. Yet they had rejected that calling and had separated themselves from the Gentiles. They had been a lamp that was hidden under a bowl rather than a lamp on a lamp stand. Jesus takes this physical image and refocuses it on the idea of eyes that allow light into our inner being (heart and mind). If our eyes are good, we can perceive and receive light. If they are bad, we are left in darkness. Then he takes it one step further. How dark is your inner darkness if your light is darkness. This is a word play – dark light. It is an oxymoron that captures this oxymoron of Israel. They were dark light. They were not light to the Gentiles but their religious mindset had made them dark light. His challenge? "See to it that the light within you is not darkness." In other words, make sure that you are embracing true light, the light of grace and mercy rather than the dark light of religion. If you have the true light within, Jesus says, then it will be as if your whole life is lighted by a lamp on the outside. This is a key teaching to grasp. Outward righteousness (external light) is the fruit of inward righteousness (inner light). "Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted (inside out), as when a light shines on you (external righteousness)." The inside out revolution of the heart marches on!