

CHAPTER 7

In this chapter we have,

I. Christ confirming the doctrine he had preached in the former chapter, with two glorious miracles — the curing of one at a distance, and that was the centurion's servant (v. 1-10), and the raising of one to life that was dead, the widow's son at Nain (v. 11-18).

II. Christ confirming the faith of John who was now in prison, and of some of his disciples, by sending him a short account of the miracles he wrought, in answer to a question he received from him (v. 19-23), to which he adds an honourable testimony concerning John, and a just reproof to the men of that generation for the contempt they put upon him and his doctrine (v. 24-35).

III. Christ comforting a poor penitent that applied herself to him, all in tears of godly sorrow for sin, assuring her that her sins were pardoned, and justifying himself in the favour he showed her against the cavils of a proud Pharisee (v. 36-50).

LUKE 7:1-10

THE HEALING OF THE CENTURION'S SERVANT

Some difference there is between this story of the cure of the centurion's servant as it is related here and as we had it in ^{<4085>}Matthew 8:5, etc. There it was said that the centurion came to Christ; here it is said that he sent to him first some of the *elders of the Jews* (v. 3), and afterwards some other *friends*, v. 6. But it is a rule that *we are said to do that which we do by another* — *Quod facimus per alium, id ipsum facere judicamur*. The centurion might be said to do that which he did by his proxies; as a man takes possession by his attorney. But it is probable that the centurion himself came at last, when Christ said to him (^{<4083>}Matthew 8:13), *As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee*.

This miracle is here said to have been wrought by our Lord Jesus *when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people*, v. 1. What Christ said he said *publicly*; whoever would might come and hear him: *In secret*

have I said nothing, ^{483D}John 18:20. Now, to give an undeniable proof of the *authority* of his *preaching word*, he here gives an incontestable proof of the *power* and *efficacy* of his *healing word*. He that had such a commanding empire in the kingdom of nature as that he could command away diseases, no doubt has such a sovereignty in the kingdom of grace as to enjoin duties displeasing to flesh and blood, and bind, under the highest penalties, to the observance of them. This miracle was wrought in Capernaum, where most of Christ's mighty works were done, ^{41E3}Matthew 11:23. Now observe,

I. The centurion's servant that was sick was *dear to his master*, v. 2. It was the praise of the servant that by his diligence and faithfulness, and a manifest concern for his master and his interest, as for himself and for his own, he recommended himself to his master's esteem and love. Servants should study to *endear* themselves to their masters. It was likewise the praise of the master that, when he had a good servant, he knew how to value him. Many masters, that are haughty and imperious, think it favour enough to the best servants they have not to rate them, and beat them, and be cruel to them, whereas they ought to be kind to them, and tender of them, and solicitous for their welfare and comfort.

II. The master, *when he heard of Jesus*, was for making application to him, v. 3. Masters ought to take particular care of their servants when they are *sick*, and not to neglect them then. This centurion begged that *Christ would come and heal his servant*. We may now, by faithful and fervent prayer, apply ourselves to Christ in heaven, and ought to do so, when sickness is in our families; for Christ is still the great Physician.

III. He sent some of the *elders of the Jews* to Christ, to represent the case, and solicit for him, thinking that a greater piece of respect to Christ than if he had come himself, because he was an uncircumcised Gentile, whom he thought Christ, being a prophet, would not care for conversing with. For that reason he sent Jews, whom he acknowledged to be favourites of Heaven, and not ordinary Jews neither, but *elders of the Jews*, persons in authority, that the dignity of the messengers might give honour to him to whom they were sent. Balak sent princes to Balaam.

IV. The elders of the Jews were hearty intercessors for the centurion: *They besought him instantly* (v. 4), were very urgent with him, pleading for the centurion that which he would never have pleaded for himself, *that*

he was worthy for whom he should do this. If any Gentile was qualified to receive such a favour, surely he was. The centurion said, *I am not so much as worthy of a visit* (^{<408>}Matthew 8:8), but the elders of the Jews thought him worthy of the cure; thus *honour shall uphold the humble in spirit. Let another man praise thee, and not thy own mouth.* But that which they insisted upon in particular was, that, though he was a Gentile, yet he was a hearty well-wisher to the Jewish nation and religion, v. 5. They thought there needed as much with Christ as there did with them to remove the prejudices against him as a Gentile, a Roman, and an officer of the army, and therefore mention this,

1. That he was well-affected to the people of the Jews: *He loveth our nation* (which few of the Gentile did). Probably he had read the Old Testament, whence it was easy to advance to a very high esteem of the Jewish nation, as favoured by Heaven above all people. Note, Even conquerors, and those *in power*, ought to keep up an affection for the conquered, and those they have *power over*.

2. That he was well-affected to their worship: *He built them a new synagogue* at Capernaum, finding that what they had was either gone to decay or not large enough to contain the people, and that the inhabitants were not of ability to build one for themselves. Hereby he testified his veneration for the God of Israel, his belief of his being the one only living and true God, and his desire, like that of Darius, to have an interest in the prayers of God's Israel, (^{<410>}Ezra 6:10. This centurion built a synagogue at his own proper costs and charges, and probably employed his soldiers that were in garrison there in the building, to keep them from idleness. Note, Building places of meeting for religious worship is a very *good work*, is an instance of love to God and his people; and those who do good works of that kind are *worthy of double honour*.

V. Jesus Christ was very ready to show kindness to the centurion. He presently *went with them* (v. 6), though he was a Gentile; for *is he the Saviour of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also,* (^{<412>}Romans 3:29. The centurion did not think himself worthy to visit Christ (v. 7), yet Christ thought him worthy to be visited by him; for those that *humble themselves shall be exalted*.

VI. The centurion, when he heard that Christ was doing him the honour to come to his house, gave further proofs both of his humility and of his

faith. Thus the graces of the saints are quickened by Christ's approaches towards them. *When he was now not far from the house*, and the centurion had notice of it, instead of setting his house in order for his reception, he *sends friends* to meet him with fresh expressions,

1. Of his *humility*: “*Lord, trouble not thyself*, for I am unworthy of such an honour, because I am a Gentile.” This bespeaks not only his low thoughts of himself notwithstanding the greatness of his figure; but his high thoughts of Christ, notwithstanding the meanness of his figure in the world. He knew how to honour a prophet of God, though he was despised and rejected of men.

2. Of his *faith*: “*Lord, trouble not thyself*, for I know there is no occasion; thou canst *cure* my servant without coming *under my roof*, by that almighty power from which *no thought can be withholden*. *Say, in a word, and my servant shall be healed*.” so far was this centurion from Namaan's fancy, that he should come to him, and stand, and *strike his hand over the patient*, and so *recover* him, ²2 Kings 5:11. He illustrates this faith of his by a comparison taken from his own profession, and is confident that Christ can as easily command away the distemper as he can command any of his soldiers, can as easily send an angel with commission to cure this servant of his as he can send a soldier on an errand, v. 8. Christ has a sovereign power over all the creatures and all their actions, and can change the course of nature as he pleases, can rectify its disorders and repair its decays in human bodies; for *all power is given to him*.

VII. Our Lord Jesus was wonderfully well pleased with the faith of the centurion, and the more surprised at it because he was a Gentile; and, the centurion's faith having thus honoured Christ, see how he honoured it (v. 9): *He turned him about*, as one amazed, and *said to the people that followed him*, *I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel*. Note, Christ will have those that follow him to observe and take notice of the great examples of faith that are sometimes set before them — especially when any such are found among those that do not follow Christ so closely as they do in profession — that we may be shamed by the strength of their faith out of the weakness and waverings of ours.

VIII. The cure was *presently* and *perfectly* wrought (v. 10). *They that were sent* knew they had their errand, and therefore went back, and found the servant well, and under no remains at all of his distemper. Christ will

take cognizance of the distressed case of poor servants, and be ready to relieve them; for there *is no respect of persons with him*. Nor are the Gentiles excluded from the benefit of his grace; nay, this was a specimen of that much greater faith which would be found among the Gentiles, when the gospel should be published, than among the Jews.

LUKE 7:11-18

THE WIDOW OF NAIN

We have here the story of Christ's raising to life a widow's son at Nain, that was dead and in the carrying out to be buried, which Matthew and Mark had made no mention of; only, in the general, Matthew had recorded it, in Christ's answer to the disciples of John, that *the dead were raised up*, 4115 Matthew 11:5. Observe,

I. Where, and when, this miracle was wrought. It was the *next day after* he had cured the centurion's servant, v. 11. Christ was doing good *every day*, and never had cause to complain that he had *lost a day*. It was done at the gate of a small city, or town, called *Nain*, not far from Capernaum, probably the same with a city called *Nais*, which Jerome speaks of.

II. Who were the witnesses of it. It is as well attested as can be, for it was done in the sight of two crowds that met in or near the gate of the city. There was a crowd of *disciples* and other *people* attending Christ (v. 11), and a crowd of relations and neighbours attending the funeral of the young man, v. 12. Thus there was a sufficient number to attest the truth of this miracle, which furnished greater proof of Christ's divine authority than his healing diseases; for by no power of nature, or any means, can the dead be raised.

III. How it was wrought by our Lord Jesus.

1. The person raised to life was a *young man*, cut off by death in the beginning of his days — a common case; *man comes forth like a flower and is cut down*. That he was really dead was universally agreed. There could be no collusion in the case; for Christ was *entering into the town*, and had not seen him till now that he met him upon the bier. He was *carried out* of the city; for the Jews' burying-places were without their

cities, and at some distance from them. This young man was the *only son of his mother*, and *she a widow*. She depended upon him to be the staff of her old age, but he proves a broken reed; every man at his best estate is so. How numerous, how various, how very calamitous, are the afflictions of the afflicted in this world! What a vale of tears is it! What a Bochim, a place of weepers! We may well think how deep the *sorrow* of this poor mother was for her *only son* (such sorrowing is referred to as expressive of the greatest grief, — ³²⁰Zechariah 12:10), and it was the deeper in that she was a *widow*, broken with breach upon breach, and a *full end made of her comforts*. *Much people of the city was with her, condoling with her loss, to comfort her*.

2. Christ showed both his *pity* and his *power* in raising him to life, that he might give a specimen of both, which shine so brightly in man's redemption.

(1.) See how *tender* his *compassions* are towards the afflicted (v. 13): *When the Lord saw the poor widow following her son to the grave, he had compassion on her*. Here was not application made to him for her, not so much as that he would speak some words of comfort to her, but, *ex mero motu* — *purely from the goodness of his nature*, he was troubled for her. The case was piteous, and he looked upon it with pity. His eye affected his heart; and he *said unto her, Weep not*. Note, Christ has a concern for the mourners, for the miserable, and often *prevents them with the blessing of his goodness*. He undertook the work of our redemption and salvation, *in his love and in his pity*, ²⁵⁹Isaiah 63:9. What a pleasing idea does this give us of the compassions of the Lord Jesus, and the multitude of his *tender mercies*, which may be very comfortable to us when at any time we are in sorrow! Let poor widows comfort themselves in their sorrows with this, that Christ *pities them* and knows their souls in adversity; and, if others despise their grief, he does not. Christ said, *Weep not*; and he could give her a reason for it which no one else could: “Weep not for a *dead son*, for he shall presently become a *living one*.” This was a reason peculiar to her case; yet there is a reason common to all that sleep in Jesus, which is of equal force against inordinate and excessive grief for their death — that they shall rise again, shall rise in glory; and therefore we must *not sorrow as those that have no hope*, ⁵⁰¹³1 Thessalonians 4:13. Let Rachel, that *weeps for her children, refrain her eyes from tears, for there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own*

border, ^{<3817>}Jeremiah 31:17. And let our *passion* at such a time be checked and claimed by the consideration of Christ's *compassion*.

(2.) See how *triumphant* his *commands* are over even death itself (v. 14): *He came, and touched the bier*, or coffin, in or upon which the dead body lay; for to him it would be no pollution. Hereby he intimated to the bearers that they should not proceed; he had something to say to the dead young man. *Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom*, ^{<3824>}Job 33:24. Hereupon *they that bore him stood still*, and probably let down the bier from their shoulders to the ground, and opened the coffin, it if was closed up; and then with solemnity, as one that had authority, and to whom belonged the issues from death, he said, *Young man, I say unto thee, Arise*. The young man was *dead*, and could not arise by any power of his own (no more can those that are spiritually dead in trespasses and sins); yet it was no absurdity at all for Christ to bid him *arise*, when a power went along with that word to *put life* into him. The gospel call to all people, to young people particularly, is, "*Arise, arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light and life.*" Christ's dominion over death was evidenced by the immediate effect of his word (v. 15): *He that was dead sat up*. Have we grace from Christ? Let us show it. Another evidence of life was that he *began to speak*; for whenever Christ gives us spiritual life he *opens the lips* in prayer and praise. And, *lastly*, he would not oblige this young man, to whom he had given a new life, to go along with him as his disciple, to minister to him (though he owed him even his own self), much less as a trophy or show to get honour by him, but *delivered him to his mother*, to attend her as became a dutiful son; for Christ's miracles were miracles of mercy, and a great act of mercy this was to this widow; now she was *comforted*, according to the time in which she had been afflicted and much more, for she could now look upon this son as a particular favourite of Heaven, with more pleasure than if he had not died.


IV. What influence it had upon the people (v. 16): *There came a fear on all*; it frightened them all, to see a dead man start up alive out of his coffin in the open street, at the command of a man; they were all struck with wonder at his miracle, and *glorified God*. The Lord and his goodness, as well as the Lord and his greatness, are to be feared. The inference they drew from it was, "*A great prophet is risen up among us*, the great prophet that we have been long looking for; doubtless, he is one divinely inspired who can thus breathe life into the dead, and in him *God hath visited his people*, to redeem them, as was expected," ^{<416>}Luke 1:68. This

would be *life from the dead* indeed to all them that waited for the consolation of Israel. When dead souls are thus raised to spiritual life, by a divine power going along with the gospel, we must glorify God, and look upon it as a gracious visit to his people. The report of this miracle was carried,

1. In general, all the country over (v. 17): *This rumour of him*, that he was the great prophet, *went forth* upon the wings of fame *through all Judea*, which lay a great way off, and throughout all Galilee, which was the *region round about*. Most had this notice of him, yet few believed in him, and gave up themselves to him. Many have the *rumour* of Christ's gospel in their ears that have not the *savour* and *relish* of it in their souls.
2. In particular, it was carefully brought to John Baptist, who was now in prison (v. 18): *His disciples came*, and gave him an account of all things, that he might know that though *he* was bound yet *the word of the Lord was not bound*; God's work was going on, though he was laid aside.

LUKE 7:19-35

JOHN'S MESSAGE TO JESUS

All this discourse concerning John Baptist, occasioned by his sending to ask whether he was the Messiah or no, we had, much as it is here related,  Matthew 11:2-19.

1. We have here the message John Baptist sent to Christ, and the return he made to it. Observe,
 1. The great thing we are to enquire concerning Christ is whether he be he that should come to redeem and save sinners, or whether we are to look for another, v. 19, 20. We are sure that God has promised that a Saviour shall come, an anointed Saviour; we are as sure that what he has promised he will perform in its season. If this Jesus be that promised Messiah, we will receive him, and will look for no other; but, if not, we will continue our expectations, and, though he tarry, will wait for him.
 2. The faith of John Baptist himself, or at least of his disciples, wanted to be *confirmed* in this matter; for Christ had not yet publicly declared himself to be indeed the Christ, nay, he would not have his disciples, who

knew him to be so, to speak of it, till the proofs of his being so were completed in his resurrection. The great men of the Jewish church had not owned him, nor had he gained any interest that was likely to set him upon the throne of his father David. Nothing of that power and grandeur was to be seen about him in which it was expected that the Messiah would appear; and therefore it is not strange that they should ask, *Art thou the Messiah?* not doubting but that, if he was not, he would direct them what *other* to look for.

3. Christ left it to his own works to praise him in the gates, to tell what he was and to prove it. While John's messengers were with him, he wrought many miraculous cures, *in that same hour*, which perhaps intimates that they staid but *an hour* with him; and what a deal of work did Christ do in a little time! v. 21. *He cured many of their infirmities and plagues* in body, and of *evil spirits* that affected the mind either with frenzy or melancholy, and *unto many that were blind he gave sight*. He multiplied the cures, that there might be no ground left to suspect a fraud; and then (v. 22) he bade them *go and tell John what they had seen*. And he and they might easily argue, as even the common people did (⁴⁰⁷³John 7:31), *When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?* These cures, which they saw him work, were not only confirmations of his commission, but explications of it. The Messiah must come to cure a diseased world, to give light and sight to them that sit in darkness, and to restrain and conquer evil spirits. You see that Jesus does this to the bodies of people, and therefore must conclude this is he that should come to do it to the souls of people, and you are to *look for no other*. To his miracles in the kingdom of nature he adds this in the kingdom of grace (v. 22), *To the poor the gospel is preached*, which they knew was to be done by the Messiah; for he was anointed to *preach the gospel to the meek* (²⁶¹¹Isaiah 61:1), and to *save the souls of the poor and needy*, ⁴⁹²³Psalms 72:13. Judge, therefore, whether you can look for any other that will more fully answer the characters of the Messiah and the great intentions of his coming.

4. He gave them an intimation of the danger people were in of being prejudiced against him, notwithstanding these evident proofs of his being the Messiah (v. 23): *Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me, or scandalized at me*. We are here in a state of trial and probation; and it is agreeable to such a state that, as there are sufficient arguments to *confirm the truth* to those that are *honest* and *impartial* in searching after it, and have their minds prepared to receive it, so there should be also objections,

to *cloud the truth* to those that are careless, worldly, and sensual. Christ's education at Nazareth, his residence at Galilee, the meanness of his family and relations, his poverty, and the despicableness of his followers — these and the like were stumbling-blocks to many, which all the miracles he wrought could not help them over. He is *blessed*, for he is wise, humble, and well disposed, that is not overcome by these prejudices. It is a sign that God has *blessed* him, for it is by his grace that he is helped over these stumbling-stones; *and he shall be blessed* indeed, blessed in Christ.

II. We have here the high encomium which Christ gave of John Baptist; not while his messengers were present (lest he should seem to flatter him), but *when they were departed* (v. 24), to make the people sensible of the advantages they had enjoyed in John's ministry, and were deprived of by his imprisonment. Let them now consider *what they went out into the wilderness to see*, who that was about whom there had been so much talk and such a great and general amazement. "Come," saith Christ, "I will tell you."

1. He was a man of unshaken *self-consistence*, a man of steadiness and constancy. He was not a *reed shaken with the wind*, first in one direction and then in another, shifting with every wind; he was *firm* as a *rock*, not *fickle* as a *reed*. If he could have bowed like a *reed* to Herod, and have complied with the court, he might have been a favourite there; but *none of these things moved him*.

2. He was a man of unparalleled *self-denial*, a great example of mortification and contempt of the world. He was not *a man clothed in soft raiment*, nor did he *live delicately* (v. 25); but, on the contrary, he lived in a wilderness and was clad and fed accordingly. Instead of adorning and pampering the body, he brought it under, and kept it in subjection.

3. He was *a prophet*, had his commission and instructions immediately from God, and not of man or by man. He was by birth a *priest*, but that is never taken notice of; for his glory, as a prophet, eclipsed the honour of his priesthood. Nay, he was *more*, he was *much more than a prophet* (v. 26), than any of the prophets of the Old Testament; for they spoke of Christ as at a distance, he spoke of him as at the door.

4. He was the harbinger and forerunner of the Messiah, and was himself prophesied of in the Old Testament (v. 27): *This is he of whom it is written* (³⁰¹Malachi 3:1), *Behold, I send my messenger before thy face*. Before he

sent the Master himself, he sent a messenger, to give notice of his coming, and prepare people to receive him. Had the Messiah been to appear as a *temporal prince*, under which character the carnal Jews expected him, his *messenger* would have appeared either in the *pomp* of a *general* or the *gaiety* of a *herald at arms*; but it was a *previous* indication, plain enough, of the *spiritual* nature of Christ's kingdom, that the messenger he sent before him to *prepare his way* did it by preaching repentance and reformation of men's hearts and lives. Certainly that kingdom was not of this world which was thus ushered in.

5. He was, upon this account, so great, that really there was not a *greater prophet* than he. *Prophets* were the *greatest* that were *born of women*, more honourable than kings and princes, and John was the *greatest* of all the *prophets*. The country was not sensible what a *valuable*, what an *invaluable*, man it had in it, when John Baptist went about preaching and baptizing. And yet *he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he*. The least gospel minister, that has obtained mercy of the Lord to be *skilful* and *faithful* in his work, or the meanest of the *apostles* and first preachers of the gospel, being *employed* under a more *excellent* dispensation, are in a more honourable office than John Baptist. The meanest of those that *follow the Lamb* far excel the greatest of those that went before him. Those therefore who live under the gospel dispensation have so much the more to answer for.

III. We have here the just censure of the men of that generation, who were not wrought upon by the ministry either of John Baptist or of Jesus Christ himself.

1. Christ here shows what contempt was put upon John Baptist, while he was preaching and baptizing.

(1.) Those who did show him any respect were but the common ordinary sort of people, who, in the eye of the gay part of mankind, were rather a disgrace to him than a credit, v. 29. *The people* indeed, the vulgar herd, of whom it was said, *This people, who know not the law, are cursed* (~~Ⓐ~~ John 7:49), and the publicans, men of ill fame, as being generally men of bad morals, or taken to be so, these were *baptized with his baptism*, and became his disciples; and these, though glorious monuments of divine grace, yet did not *magnify John* in the eye of the world; but by their repentance and reformation they *justified God*, justified his conduct and

the wisdom of it in appointing such a one as John Baptist to be the forerunner of the Messiah: they hereby made it to appear that it was the best method that could be taken, for it was not in vain to *them* whatever it was to others.

(2.) The great men of their church and nation, the *polite* and the *politicians*, that would have done him some credit in the eye of the world, did him all the dishonour they could; they heard him indeed, but they were not *baptized of him*, v. 30. The Pharisees, who were most in reputation for religion and devotion, and the lawyers, who were celebrated for their learning, especially their knowledge of the scriptures, *rejected the counsel of God against themselves; they frustrated it, they received the grace of God, by the baptism of John, in vain.* God in sending that *messenger* among them had a kind *purpose* of good to them, *designed* their salvation by it, and, if they had closed with the counsel of God, it had been *for themselves*, they had been made for ever; but they *rejected it*, would not comply with it, and it was *against themselves*, it was to their own ruin; they came short of the benefit intended them, and not only so, but forfeited the grace of God, put a bar in their own door, and, by refusing that discipline which was to fit them for the kingdom of the Messiah, shut themselves out of it, and they not only excluded themselves, but hindered others, and stood in their way.

2. He here shows the strange perverseness of the men of that generation, in their cavils both against John and Christ, and the prejudices they conceived against them.

(1.) They made but a jesting matter of the methods God took to do them good (v. 31): “*Whereunto shall I liken the men of this generation? What can I think of absurd enough to represent them by? They are, then, like children sitting in the market-place*, that mind nothing that is serious, but are as full of play as they can hold. As if God were but in jest with them, in all the methods he takes to do them good, as children are with one another in the market-place (v. 32), they turn it all off with a banter, and are not more affected with it than with a piece of pageantry.” This is the ruin of multitudes, they can never persuade themselves to be *serious* in the concerns of their souls. Old men, sitting in the sanhedrim, were but as *children sitting in the market-place*, and no more affected with the things that belonged to their everlasting peace than people are with children's

play. O the amazing stupidity and vanity of the blind and ungodly world! The Lord awakens them out of their security.

(2.) They still found something or other to carp at.

[1.] John Baptist was a reserved austere man, lived much in solitude, and ought to have been admired for being such a humble, sober, self-denying man, and hearkened to as a man of thought and contemplation; but this, which was his praise, was turned to his reproach. Because he came *neither eating nor drinking*, so freely, plentifully, and cheerfully, as others did, *you say*, “*He has a devil; he is a melancholy man, he is possessed, as the demoniac whose dwelling was among the tombs, though he be not quite so wild.*”

[2.] Our Lord Jesus was of a more free and open conversation; he *came eating and drinking*, v. 34. He would go and dine with Pharisees, though he knew they did not care for him; and with publicans, though he knew they were no credit to him; yet, in hopes of doing good both to the one and the other, he conversed familiarly with them. By this it appears that the ministers of Christ may be of very different tempers and dispositions, very different ways of preaching and living, and yet all good and useful; *diversity of gifts*, but each given to *profit withal*. Therefore none must make themselves a standard to all others, nor judge hardly of those that do not do just as they do. John Baptist bore witness to Christ, and Christ applauded John Baptist, though they were the reverse of each other in their way of living. But the common enemies of them both reproached them both. The very same men that had represented John as *crazed in his intellects*, because he came *neither eating nor drinking*, represented our Lord Jesus as *corrupt in his morals*, because he came *eating and drinking; he is a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber*. Ill-will never speaks well. See the malice of wicked people, and how they put the worst construction upon every thing they meet with in the gospel, and in the preachers and professors of it; and hereby they think to depreciate *them*, but really destroy *themselves*.

3. He shows that, notwithstanding this, God will be glorified in the salvation of a chosen remnant (v. 35): *Wisdom is justified of all her children*. There are those who are given to wisdom *as her children*, and they shall be brought by the grace of God to submit to wisdom's conduct and government, and thereby to justify wisdom in the ways she takes for bringing them to that submission; for to them they are effectual, and

thereby appear well chosen. Wisdom's children are herein unanimous, one and all, they have all a complacency in the methods of grace which divine wisdom takes, and think never the worse of them for their being ridiculed by some.

LUKE 7:36-50

CHRIST IN THE HOUSE OF THE PHARISEE

When and where this passage of story happened does not appear; this evangelist does not observe order of time in his narrative so much as the other evangelists do; but it comes in here, upon occasion of Christ's being reproached as *a friend to publicans and sinners*, to show that it was only for their good, and to bring them to repentance, that he conversed with them; and that those whom he admitted hear him were reformed, or in a hopeful way to be so. Who this woman was that here testified so great an affection to Christ does not appear; it is commonly said to be Mary Magdalene, but I find no ground in scripture for it: she is described (~~☞~~ Luke 8:2 and ~~☞~~ Mark 16:9) to be one *out of whom Christ had cast seven devils*; but that is not mentioned here, and therefore it is probable that it was not she. Now observe here,

I. The civil entertainment which a Pharisee gave to Christ, and his gracious acceptance of that entertainment (v. 36): *One of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him*, either because he thought it would be a reputation to him to have such a guest at his table or because his company would be an entertainment to him and his family and friends. It appears that this Pharisee did not believe in Christ, for he will not own him to be a *prophet* (v. 39), and yet our Lord Jesus accepted his invitation, *went into his house, and sat down to meat*, that they might see he took the same liberty with Pharisees that he did with publicans, in hopes of *doing them good*. And those may venture further into the society of such as are prejudiced against Christ, and his religion, who have wisdom and grace sufficient to instruct and argue with them, than others may.

II. The great respect which a poor penitent sinner showed him, when he was at meat in the Pharisee's house. It was a woman in the city *that was a sinner*, a Gentile, a *harlot*, I doubt, known to be so, and infamous. She

knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, and, having been converted from her wicked course of life by his preaching, she came to acknowledge her obligations to him, having no opportunity of doing it in any other way than by *washing* his feet, and anointing them with some sweet ointment that she brought with her for that purpose. The way of sitting at table then was such that their feet were partly *behind them*. Now this woman did not look Christ in the face, but came *behind him*, and did the part of a *maid-servant*, whose office it was to *wash the feet* of the guests (~~1025~~ 1 Samuel 25:41) and to prepare the ointments.

Now in what this good woman did, we may observe,

1. Her *deep humiliation* for sin. She stood behind him *weeping*; her eyes had been the inlets and outlets of sin, and now she makes them fountains of tears. Her face is now foul with weeping, which perhaps used to be covered with paints. Her hair now made a towel of, which before had been plaited and adorned. We have reason to think that she had before sorrowed for sin; but, now that she had an opportunity of coming into the presence of Christ, the wound bled afresh and her sorrow was renewed. Note, It well becomes penitents, upon all their approaches to Christ, to renew their godly sorrow and shame for sin, *when he is pacified*, ~~2365~~ Ezekiel 16:63.

2. Her *strong affection* to the Lord Jesus. This was what our Lord Jesus took special notice of, that she *loved much*, v. 42, 47. She *washed his feet*, in token of her ready submission to the meanest office in which she might *do him honour*. Nay, she washed them with *her tears*, tears of joy; she was in a transport, to find herself so near her Saviour, whom her soul loved. She *kissed his feet*, as one unworthy of the kisses of his mouth, which the spouse coveted, ~~200~~ Song of Solomon 1:2. It was a kiss of adoration as well as affection. *She wiped them with her hair*, as one entirely devoted to his honour. Her eyes shall yield water to wash them, and her hair be a towel to wipe them; and she *anointed* his feet *with the ointment*, owning him hereby to be the Messiah, the *Anointed*. She anointed his feet in token of her consent to God's design in anointing his head with the *oil of gladness*. Note, All true penitents have a dear love to the Lord Jesus.

III. The offence which the Pharisee took at Christ, for admitting the respect which this poor penitent paid him (v. 39): *He said within himself* (little thinking that Christ knew what he thought), *This man, if he were a prophet*, would then have so much *knowledge* as to perceive that *this*

woman is a sinner, is a Gentile, is a woman of ill fame, and so much sanctity as therefore not to suffer her to come so near him; for can one of such a character approach a prophet, and his heart not rise at it? See how apt proud and narrow souls are to think that others should be as haughty and censorious as themselves. Simon, if she had touched him, would have said, *Stand by thyself, come not near me, for I am holier than thou* (215) (Isaiah 65:5); and he thought Christ should say so too.

IV. Christ's justification of the woman in what she did to him, and of himself in admitting it. Christ knew what the Pharisee spoke *within himself*, and made answer to it: *Simon, I have something to say unto thee*, v. 40. Though he was kindly entertained at his table, yet even there he reprov'd him for what he saw amiss in him, and would not *suffer sin upon him*. Those whom Christ hath *something against* he hath something to *say to*, for his *Spirit shall reprove*. Simon is willing to give him the hearing: *He saith, Master, say on*. Though he could not believe him to be a prophet (because he was not so nice and precise as he was), yet he can compliment him with the title of *Master*, among those that cry *Lord, Lord*, but *do not the things which he saith*. Now Christ, in his answer to the Pharisee, reasons thus: — It is true this woman has been a sinner: he knows it; but she is a *pardoned* sinner, which supposes her to be a *penitent* sinner. What she did to him was an expression of her *great love* to her Saviour, by whom her sins were forgiven. If she was pardoned, who had been *so great a sinner*, it might reasonably be expected that she should love her Saviour more than others, and should give greater proofs of it than others; and if this was the fruit of her love, and flowing from a sense of the pardon of her sin, it became him to accept of it, and it ill became the Pharisee to be offended at it. Now Christ has a further intention in this. The Pharisee doubted whether he was a *prophet* or no, nay, he did in effect deny it; but Christ shows that he was more than a prophet, for he is one that has *power on earth to forgive sins*, and to whom are due the affections and thankful acknowledgments of penitent pardoned sinners. Now, in his answer,

1. He by a parable forces Simon to acknowledge that the greater sinner this woman had been the greater love she ought to show to Jesus Christ when her *sins were pardoned*, v. 41-43. A man had *two debtors* that were both insolvent, but one of them owed him *ten times* more than the other. He very freely *forgave them both*, and did not take the advantage of the law against them, did not order them and their children to be sold, or *deliver*

them to the tormentors. Now they were both sensible of the great kindness they had received; but *which of them will love him most?* Certainly, saith the Pharisee, he to *whom he forgave most;* and herein he rightly judged. Now we, being obliged to *forgive,* as we are and hope to be *forgiven,* may hence learn the duty between debtor and creditor.

(1.) The *debtor,* if he have *any thing to pay,* ought to make satisfaction to his *creditor.* No man can reckon any thing *his own* or have any comfortable enjoyment of it, but that which is so when *all his debts are paid.*

(2.) If God in his providence have disabled the debtor to pay his debt, the creditor ought not to be severe with him, nor to go to the utmost rigour of the law with him, but *freely to forgive him.* *Summum jus est summa injuria* — *The law stretched into rigour becomes unjust.* Let the unmerciful creditor read that parable, ^{<483>}Matthew 18:23, etc., and tremble; for *they* shall have judgment without mercy that show no mercy.

(3.) The debtor that has found his creditors merciful ought to be very grateful to them; and, if he cannot otherwise recompense them, ought to love them. Some insolvent debtors, instead of being *grateful,* are *spiteful,* to their creditors that lose by them, and cannot give them a good word, only because they complain, whereas losers may have leave to speak. But this parable speaks of God as the Creator (or rather of the Lord Jesus himself, for he it is that forgives, and is beloved by, the debtor) and sinners are the debtors: and so we may learn here,

[1.] That *sin is a debt,* and *sinners are debtors* to God Almighty. As creatures, we owe a debt, a debt of obedience to the precept of the law, and, for non-payment of that, as sinners, we become liable to the penalty. We have not paid our rent; nay, we have wasted our Lord's goods, and so we become debtors. God has an action against us for the injury we have done him, and the omission of our duty to him.

[2.] That some are deeper in debt to God, by reason of sin, than others are: *One owed five hundred pence and the other fifty.* The Pharisee was the less debtor, yet he a debtor too, which was more than he thought himself, but rather that God was his debtor, ^{<490>}Luke 18:10, 11. This woman, that had been a scandalous notorious sinner, was the *greater debtor.* Some sinners are in themselves greater debtors than others, and some sinners, by reason of divers aggravating circumstances, greater debtors; as those that

have sinned most openly and scandalously, that have sinned against greater light and knowledge, more convictions and warnings, and more mercies and means.

[3.] That, whether our debt be more or less, it is *more* than we are able to pay: *They had nothing to pay*, nothing at all to make a composition with; for the debt is great, and we have nothing at all to pay it with. Silver and gold will not pay our debt, nor will sacrifice and offering, no, not *thousands of rams*. No righteousness of our own will pay it, no, not our repentance and obedience for the future; for it is what we are already bound to, and it is God that works it within us.

[4.] That the God of heaven is *ready* to forgive, *frankly* to forgive, poor sinners, upon gospel terms, though their debt be ever so great. If we repent, and believe in Christ, our iniquity shall not be our ruin, it shall not be laid to our charge. God has proclaimed his name gracious and merciful, and ready to forgive sin; and, his Son having purchased pardon for penitent believers, his gospel promises it to them, and his Spirit seals it and gives them the comfort of it.

[5.] That those who have their sins *pardoned* are obliged to *love him* that pardoned them; and the more is forgiven them, the more they should love him. The *greater sinners* any have been before their conversion, the *greater saints* they should be after, the more they should study to do for God, and the more their hearts should be enlarged in obedience. When a *persecuting Saul* became a preaching Paul he *laboured more abundantly*.

2. He applies this parable to the different temper and conduct of the Pharisee and the sinner towards Christ. Though the Pharisee would not allow Christ to be a prophet, Christ seems ready to allow him to be in a justified state, and that he was one *forgiven*, though to him *less was forgiven*. He did indeed show some love to Christ, in inviting him to his house, but nothing to what this poor woman showed. "Observe," saith Christ to him, "she is one that has much forgiven her, and therefore, according to thine own judgment, it might be expected that she should love much more than thou dost, and so it appears. *Seest thou this woman?* v. 44. Thou lookest upon her with contempt, but consider how much kinder a friend she is to me than thou art; should I then accept thy kindness, and refuse hers?"

(1.) “Thou didst not so much as order a basin of water to be brought, to wash my feet in, when I came in, wearied and dirtied with my walk, which would have been some refreshment to me; but she has done much more: *she has washed my feet with tears*, tears of affection to me, tears of affliction for sin, and has *wiped them with the hairs of her head*, in token of her great love to me.”

(2.) “Thou didst not so much as kiss my cheek” (which was a usual expression of a hearty and affectionate welcome to a friend); “but *this woman has not ceased to kiss my feet* (v. 45), thereby expressing both a humble and an affectionate love.”

(3.) “Thou didst not provide me a little common oil, as usual, to anoint my head with; but she has bestowed a box of precious *ointment* upon *my feet* (v. 46), so far has she outdone thee.” The reason why some people blame the pains and expense of zealous Christians, in religion, is because they are not willing themselves to come up to it, but resolve to rest in a *cheap* and *easy* religion.

3. He silenced the Pharisee's cavil: *I say unto thee, Simon, her sins, which are many, are forgiven*, v. 47. He owns that she had been guilty of *many sins*: “But they are *forgiven* her, and therefore it is no way unbecoming in me to accept her kindness. They *are forgiven*, for *she loved much*.” It should be rendered, *therefore she loved much*; for it is plain, by the tenour of Christ's discourse, that the loving much was not the *cause*, but the *effect*, of her pardon, and of her comfortable sense of it; for *we love God* because *he first loved us*; he did not forgive us because we first loved him. “But *to whom little is forgiven*, as is to thee, *the same loveth little*, as thou dost.” Hereby he intimates to the Pharisee that his love to Christ was so little that he had reason to question whether he loved him at all in sincerity; and, consequently, whether indeed his sin, though comparatively *little*, were forgiven him. Instead of grudging greater sinners the mercy they find with Christ, upon their repentance, we should be stirred up by their example to examine ourselves whether we be indeed forgiven, and do love Christ.

4. He silenced her fears, who probably was discouraged by the Pharisee's conduct, and yet would not so far yield to the discouragement as to fly off.

(1.) Christ said unto her, *Thy sins are forgiven*, v. 48. Note, The more we express our sorrow for sin, and our love to Christ, the clearer evidence we

have of the forgiveness of our sins; for it is by the experience of a *work of grace* wrought *in us* that we obtain the assurance of an *act of grace* wrought *for us*. How well was she paid for her pains and cost, when she was dismissed with this word from Christ, *Thy sins are forgiven!* and what an effectual prevention would this be of her return to sin again!

(2.) Though there were those present who quarrelled with Christ, in their own minds, for presuming to forgive sin, and to pronounce sinners absolved (v. 49), as those had done (~~40B~~ Matthew 9:3), yet he *stood to what he had said*; for as he had there proved that he had *power to forgive sin*, by curing the man sick of the palsy, and therefore would not here take notice of the cavil, so he would now show that he had *pleasure in forgiving sin*, and it was his delight; he loves to speak pardon and peace to penitents: *He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee*, v. 50. This would confirm and double her comfort in the forgiveness of her sin, that she was *justified by her faith*. All these expressions of sorrow for sin, and love to Christ, were the effects and products of faith; and therefore, as faith of all graces doth most honour God, so Christ doth of all graces put most honour upon faith. Note, They who know that their faith hath saved them may go in peace, may go on their way rejoicing.