

The Church of the Servant King *Survey of the Bible Series – Luke*

Luke 7:1-17

SB_LK7A_The Centurion's Servant_Widow at Nain

Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant (7:1-10; Matthew 8:5-13)

Luke mentions the Jewish elders (Luke 7:3), whereas Matthew records this event as if the Centurion himself asked for help from Jesus. Most likely, Matthew did not want to mention the Jewish elders that were sent by the Centurion because Matthew wanted to maintain focus upon the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. Luke, however, has a different focus, i.e. that of Gentile acceptance. Some other observations about this passage:

- A centurion in the Roman army was a commander of a century, a group of 100 soldiers. This centurion in Capernaum, unlike most Roman soldiers, was well liked and respected by the Jewish people in and around Capernaum because he loved them and built them a synagogue (Luke 7:4-5).
- This centurion had great concern for those under his charge as evidenced by his concern for the servant who was sick and about to die.
- The centurion gave evidence of his humility before the Lord by recognizing the Lord's sovereignty and by recognizing the true place of Israel in God's plan. He recognized that Jesus came to the Jews first as the chosen people. This is evidenced by the centurion's statement in Luke 7:6 that he was "not worthy that You should enter under my roof." It is also evidenced by the centurion's use of the word "Lord." The centurion recognized his unworthiness and thus manifested the attitude that would be ready to accept the kingdom similar to that found in the first beatitude (Matt 5:3).
- The Centurion understood authority; therefore, he realized that Jesus did not need to travel to him for Jesus' orders to be executed.
- All authority belonged to the emperor of Rome and was delegated. To disobey a centurion was tantamount to disobedience to the emperor himself. The centurion understood that Jesus had authority delegated from God Himself. When Jesus spoke, God spoke. If Jesus gave a command to be healed, in effect God gave the command. Therefore, it did not matter where Jesus was when he gave the command.
- Jesus marveled because here was a man who was not of the nation or race to whom the kingdom was promised who had greater faith than the sons of the kingdom (7:9). This was the kind of faith that Jesus was looking to find in Israel.
- Faith such as this made entrance into the kingdom possible regardless of the national, racial, or geographical residence, i.e. the East and the West of Matthew 8:11.
- However, the "sons of the kingdom" of Matthew 8:12 (i.e. the Jews) were the ones that possessed the covenants and the promises and should have been the heirs to the kingdom.
- The commendation of the Gentile centurion was a strong rebuke to the Jewish people since the Israelites thought that they would have priority in the coming kingdom (see Isa 45:14; Zech 8:23; Rom 9:3-5; Eph 2:11, 12). This served both Matthew's and Luke's purposes well in each of their respective Gospels, i.e. Matthew's focus upon the Jewish rejection and Luke's Gentile focus.
- Jesus made it clear that just being a physical descendant of Abraham did not guarantee entrance into His Kingdom.
- In Matthew 8:11, the coming Kingdom is commonly portrayed in terms of a feast, particularly a wedding feast (see 22:1-14; Isa 25:6; Rev 19:7-10).
- The "outer darkness" in Matthew 8:12 refers to the fate of those who don't endure and who will not reign in the kingdom (cf. 22:13; Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 2:12, 13; 2 John 8; Rev 3:11). Some passages refer to those who did not believe in Jesus' day when the kingdom was offered; some refer to those who either do not believe or who are unfaithful believers in the Church Age; and other passages refer to those who don't believe in the Tribulation.

- Each of these categories will not participate to one degree or another in the reign of Christ in the Millennium.
- Each time the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is used, it refers to judgment on unbelievers before the Millennium is established rather than being some type of reference to a purgatory of sorts for believers during the Millennium.¹ Matthew uses this phrase in 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30 and Luke uses it once in 13:28.

Jesus Raises the Son of the Widow of Nain (7:11-17)

This is an example of Jesus’ great compassion and understanding of the plight of those who were suffering. Widows in the ancient world were an especially destitute lot if they had no male relatives to care for them.² Help for widows is a frequent issue addressed in Scripture (e.g. Ex 22:22; Deut 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:19, 20, 21; 26:12, 13; 27:19; Isa 1:17; Jas 1:27 among many others). This woman who was a widow had just experienced the death of her only son and along with his death, the realization that her plot in life would be very rough. Jesus’ touching of the coffin was not necessary to raise the man from the dead; however, Jesus wanted to demonstrate the spirit and not the letter of the Law. He preferred to help this woman in a practical way rather than remain ceremonially clean under the Law (Num 19:11, 16). He knew that the Law also made provision for the restoration of His ceremonially clean status, so this temporary inconvenience was not a problem to Jesus as it would have been to the religious leaders of Israel. The crowd recognized the parallel between Jesus raising of the widow’s son and the work of the great prophets Elijah (1 Ki 17:17-24) and Elisha (2 Ki 4:8-37).

¹ Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, North Carolina: 1992), 348. Although Joseph Dillow specifically states that “there is no protestant purgatory here” in Matthew 8:12, that is in fact what he implies since he interprets this passage as applicable to believers without dispensational distinction who have not been “sons indeed.” Obviously, if the reward for faithful service in time by the Church Age believer is somehow tied to ruling and reigning with Christ as some Pauline passages imply, then a natural conclusion would be that the unfaithful believer of the Church Age would be denied that privilege. However, there is no teaching in the New Testament that specifies exactly how resurrected believers of all dispensations (including the Church Age) will rule and reign with Christ in the Millennial, Messianic Kingdom. Furthermore, Jesus’ teaching here is directed to Jews and the nation Israel within the Age of Israel, not to the Church as the Body of Christ within the Church Age. See my analysis of the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” in the Matthew series (*SB_MT8_A Chart Analyzing the Phrase Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth in the Gospels*).

² See Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 1364 for interesting comments regarding the status and plight of widows.