

March 3 – Leader’s Guide

Luke 7:1-17 “Only say the Word, and I will be Healed”

God’s law was intended for our flourishing, our freedom, not only individually but collectively as it was meant to undergird a society of justice and righteousness. But a question came to the fore: what happens when two of God’s laws come into conflict? This was a debate that raged during Jesus’ ministry as it asked the question, which one was heavy? Which one was light? Meaning to which command do you give the greatest weight? Jesus and the Pharisees often resolved this conflict differently leading to their conflict. We will first look at a clear example of this from a previous passage in Luke.

Read Luke 6: 6-11

1. In this story two of God’s laws are in conflict – Sabbath keeping and Love of Neighbour. From the story which command is given the greater weight for the Pharisees? Jesus?

The Pharisees gave greatest weight to the command to keep Sabbath. With that conviction Jesus should have delayed his healing “work” until the next day. In their mind then his resolving of the tension in this way was in fact a breaking of God’s law and as a result meant he should face the penalty of that breach – death...

For Jesus greatest weight was to be given to love of neighbour. So he set aside temporarily the command to keep Sabbath in order to extend love to the man with the withered hand.

2. How does seeing this dynamic at play in the ministry of Jesus bring greater understanding to Jesus’ approach to the law?

This lens can certainly help us understand his ongoing conflict with the Pharisees which is not so much about the place of God’s law in the life of the one who seeks to worship the living God but rather about how to resolve conflict when two laws are in tension.

At times we hear Jesus’ critics accuse him of breaking the law and think to ourselves – O this means that in Jesus I have the freedom to set aside God’s law. We often do this motivated by our own convenience or to satisfy our own desires. Jesus however never broke God’s law, he simply resolved that tension in a different way than his contemporaries.

His giving greatest weight to love of neighbour guides us in terms of how we live out our lives as followers of Jesus.

Read Luke 7:1-17; Numbers 19:11-13; 1 Kings 17:17-24

3. Here we have two stories where there is tension between two sets of God's law – purity law and love of neighbour. How does Jesus resolving the conflict in the way that he does help us understand more of what it is to follow Jesus?

As with the Sabbath controversies we see that in following Jesus love of neighbour is to be given the greatest weight.

In the story of the centurion, we see that Jesus extended love even to the enemy, even to the gentile. So love of neighbour is for any neighbour.

In the story of the raising of the widow's son we see that Jesus was motivated by compassion. This is the strongest word in the Greek language to express sympathy. It literally meant to be gutted with compassion. We are called to be as Jesus was motivated to action by compassion, being utterly gutted with compassion.

4. When we encounter the need of a neighbour we are unlikely to feel the tension between two sets of God's law but there is tension nonetheless. There are indeed things that keep us from giving the greatest weight to love of neighbour in our lives. What are those things? How does Jesus invite us to resolve this tension?

Though not exhaustive here was the unedited section of the sermon where Tim addressed this question.

When met with the need of a neighbour – any neighbour – near - far – friend - enemy – we're not likely to feel the tension between two sets of commands – as the first century listener felt - but there's tension, nonetheless.

There's the tension of – well if I give to this person – this resource – this time – energy – I won't have it for myself – I'll be diminished – my standard of living will drop – how then shall we live – choose mercy – choose love.

There is the tension of – well I'm scared to enter into this situation – it's messy – I'm afraid – I'm not sure I see a clear path to resolution – how then shall we live – choose mercy – choose love.

There's the tension of – well if I serve this person in this way they're going to think I'm ok with the way they have hurt me – wronged me – how then shall we live – no it wasn't ok what they did to you – but choose mercy – choose love.

There's the tension of – and you often hear this in a certain segment of the church – well if I help this person – this group of people they'll think that I approve of their lifestyle – this was often the Pharisees critique of Jesus – you are spending time with sinners and tax collectors – you are affirming their lifestyle – was Jesus affirming their lifestyle choices by extending love and mercy – not at all – and it was often only in the mercy that the person would see – I may not be living as I should – judgement doesn't bring about life change - mercy does – the cross makes that undeniably clear - How then shall we live? – gutted with compassion – love of neighbour – any neighbour is to be given greatest weight.

5. Seeing who we are called to be in Jesus leads us to cry out – O Lord make me new – heal me – transform me! As we see in this story healing comes about through faith in Jesus. What do we learn here about the nature of faith?

Faith is not rooted in theological correctness. The centurion simply believes that Jesus is a conduit of God's power. While not true Jesus is far more than that. The crowd, seeing in the raising of the widows son the miracle performed by Elijah generations before concludes that Jesus is a prophet. While not true a simple comparison of the stories will reveal that Jesus is far more than that. Not for a moment would I suggest that we shouldn't come to deepen in our understanding of who Jesus is but if we begin to trust in our understanding rather than Jesus himself we are trusting in our subjective experience of faith rather than the object of our faith.

Faith is not rooted in good people get good things. This is the faith enacted by the elders of the synagogue. A thread of this likely exists in every single one of our hearts.

Faith is not about the subjective amount of our faith.

Faith is rooted in the object of our faith – Jesus.

Jesus marvels at the centurion's faith. I am not worthy to receive you, only say the word and I will be healed. I am not worthy – I can't change, heal,

transform, save myself... Only say the word – I need you to heal to save to change to transform.