Luke 7-8 – Miracles and faith

The next two stories are reminiscent of stories of healing and resurrection performed by Elijah and Elisha in the healing of Naaman by Elisha (2 Kings 5:1-19) and the raising of the widow’s son by Elijah in 1 Kings 10:17-24). This reminds us of Jesus’ remarks to the Nazarenes in chapter 4, which provoked them to try to kill Jesus by throwing Him off a cliff. We see here the first outreach of Jesus to gentiles and the mercy shown by Jesus to a poor widow, whose social worth was far less than that of the Roman officer in the preceding story, but whose worth to Jesus was immeasurable.

*7:1-10 – Worthiness and authority*

Jesus performs another miracle. This one illustrates the teaching of Jesus on what makes someone worthy. A Roman military officer, who represented the Roman imperial order and the presumed enemy of the Jewish aspirations, wants Jesus to heal his slave, so he sends elders of the Jewish people who we assumes will be able to appeal to Jesus based on their social position. They attempt to persuade Jesus based on the officer’s worth as one who has contributed to the Jewish nation. The Roman officer recognizes his own unworthiness and asks only for a word, because he recognizes the authority of Jesus’ word. The slave was healed. The point of the story is Jesus’ statement that “not even in Israel have I found such faith.” The remarkable thing about the officer’s faith is not the depth or confidence of the faith. There is no hint of that in the story. It is the combination of humble recognition of unworthiness and recognition of Jesus’ authority.

*7:11-17 – Raising of the widow’s son*

Jesus’ healing power is granted to someone whose existence was now threatened by loss of both husband and only son. No one had to ask Jesus for this resurrection. He initiated the action. That Jesus “gave him to his mother” is an exact quote of 1 Kings 10:23b, which says that after the boy came to life, Elijah “gave him to his mother.”

*7:18 – 23 – Reassurance for John the Baptist*

John sent disciples to ask Jesus if He is the one that John was preparing the way for. Luke does not interpret this as doubt (though it may have been) since Luke has not yet reported any sign for John to demonstrate that he recognized Jesus as the Messiah. For Luke this is just a question that needs an answer. Jesus’ answer is a reference back to His quotation of Isaiah in Luke 4:18-19 – the blind see, the sick are released, the dead are raised, and “the good news is preached to the poor.” This confirms the centrality of 4:18-19 for Luke’s story. Blessings are for those who are not offended; who can accept that the Messiah is one whose mission is one of release from all kinds of captivity and good news for the poor.

*7:24 – 35 – affirmation of John the Baptist*

John is not your typical influencer. He is rough, lives in the desert, is poorly dressed, and eats poorly. But he was not sent by God to impress people with is status or fine living. He was sent to fulfill Malachi 3:1 by preparing the people for Jesus, and he was well-received by the common people and sinners. He is at the same time the greatest prophet ever, and the least in the Kingdom of God. Our world neither accepts John, who seemed to be crazy because he doesn’t eat or drink, nor Jesus who does. Our world wants only those who will conform to its ways and prejudices about who is worthy and who is not.

*7:36-50 – “Inappropriate” behavior at a nice dinner party*

The Pharisee, Simon, rejected the woman because she was a “sinner.” He did not recognize that he too was a sinner. She knew her sinfulness, accepted Jesus’ forgiveness, and loved Him (to the point of extravagant inappropriateness) for it.

*8:1-3 – Among his followers were women*

… who had wealth and provided for Jesus’ disciples out of their love for Him because He had released them from demons and sickness.

*8:4-15 – The Parable of the Sower*

The word of Christ will only bear fruit in those who “hold fast” to it with a pure heart, who resist the devil, who persevere when times are tough, and who are not distracted by cares, wealth, and pleasures of life.

*8:16-21 – Pay heed to the Word of God*

Luke does not say that we are the light. For Luke this is a warning that nothing remains hidden, so we have to pay heed to His word. We won’t get away with hidden sins. Those who heed the word of God are Jesus’ true family (This is similar to the lesson of the parable of the sower.)

*8:22-25 – Jesus calms the storm*

This is partly a lesson on faith, but even more a lesson on Jesus’ authority even over the natural order. The two concepts go hand-in-hand. As usual, the last line of the story expresses the main point.

*8:26-39 – Release from demonic captivity*

The demons held the man in a captivity even worse than the captivity of chains. He represents all humans who unknowingly are held in the captivity of this world and the devil who is the enemy of us all. The two reactions are instructive. The people saw that the man had been delivered from the demons, and in fear of Jesus’ power, they rejected Him and asked Him to leave. (We often assume that they were annoyed at the financial loss caused by the drowning of the herd of pigs, but Luke does not mention it.) The man sat at the feet of Jesus (the proper stance for a disciple), begged to be with Jesus, and obeyed by going out and proclaiming what Jesus had done. Some reject Jesus because they fear that if His power were to be released in their lives, they would have to abandon the comfort of the status quo. Others are drawn to His power and follow Him, accepting the risk of uncomfortable change.

*8:40-56 – 2 stories of release from the captivity of sickness and death*

Jairus, who represents the whole Jewish social structure as president of the synagogue, like the Roman officer, took the risk of humbling himself before Jesus. The woman serves as a contrast in status since she was constantly unclean because of her constant bleeding. But like Jairus, her behavior displays her humble approach, as she took a very different risk of defiling a holy man by touching him in her uncleanness. Jesus does not rebuke her, but grants her healing and peace. In our spiritual uncleanness, Jesus also grants us healing and peace. Similarly Jesus raises the little girl to life, using vocabulary that is reminiscent of New Testament teaching on death (sleep) and resurrection (2 different Greek words for “arise”).