

What Pleases the Lord Luke 7

We are picking up again in our study of Luke. After next week we will move into our fall series and then we'll get back to Luke after that. We are seeking to grow as disciples of Christ by studying his life and ministry. We've seen Jesus begin his ministry tour in Galilee and become very popular because of his healing and teaching. In the last sermon we looked at the Sermon on the Mount that he preached to a huge multitude, and now, in chapter 7 we find some stories that happened after that. We're going to look at two of them today.

One of the strongest motivating factors in my earlier life was the desire to please people. I don't really remember what that felt like when I was a kid, but when I was in high school and college it had a powerful influence on me. I wanted to impress everyone – my coaches, teachers, classmates, parents... I was a full-blown people pleaser, and it wasn't good. It was an idol in my life and the Lord has graciously been breaking it down and giving me a new desire in its place, and that desire is to please him. I want to live for his praise rather than the praise of man. I want him to be pleased with me. And I think that's the same desire he plants in all of our hearts. As followers of Christ, we want to live lives that please him. In Ephesians 5:10 Paul urges us to *"find out what pleases the Lord."*

This morning I want us to think about: What does that kind of life actually look like? I think we all have some idea in our minds and try to live that way, but I also think our ideas can be off. As I look back over my relationship with Christ, I know I've been off at times. Things in our background or misunderstandings of Scripture can cause us to misunderstand what Christ is really looking for. We might end up thinking he is pleased with how we're living when he's really not, or we might assume he's displeased when that's not really true either. We need a clear and accurate understanding of what pleases the Lord and that's what we're aiming for this morning.

In the stories we're going to look at, we're going to see some things that are very clearly pleasing to the Lord as well as some things that are not. And it may be that we will see some things that will change our perspectives. You may feel conviction or you may feel freedom and relief. Either way, these stories should bring greater clarity about how to live in a way that's pleasing to Christ.

First Story: Luke 7:1-10.

After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. ³ When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue." ⁶ And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ⁷ Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸ For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." ⁹ When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." ¹⁰ And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

One of the things that sticks out to me in this story is the way Jesus responded to this centurion – he marveled at him. You don't see Jesus marveling at very many people (in a good way). This was a man who pleased the Lord. And it's interesting because he was a very unlikely candidate. He wasn't a Jew; he was a Roman. And he wasn't just any Roman, he was a centurion. That means he was a commander of 100 Roman soldiers. These guys were typically hated by the Jews. They were the enforcers of Roman oppression. So for Jesus to marvel at him is very surprising.

Why did he marvel? The elders pointed out that he loved Israel and built the synagogue in Capernaum, but those weren't the reasons Jesus marveled at him. Luke highlights two other things. The first is easy to pick up on, and that was his faith – he believed that Jesus had the power and authority to heal his servant. That's why he sent for him in the first place and why he told Jesus to not trouble himself by coming all the way to his home – "Just say the word and let my servant be healed." That was a strong faith and Jesus was pleased with that.

But there's one more characteristic that's evident in the way Luke tells this story. Notice what the Jewish elders told Jesus about the centurion: "*He is worthy to have you do this for him.*" Because of his good treatment of the Jews, they felt he

was worthy to have Jesus heal his servant. But notice what the centurion said about himself when he heard Jesus was on his way: "*I am not worthy* to have you come under my roof." He had an attitude of humility before Christ. Even though he was a Roman commander, he did not see himself as higher than him.

So Jesus marveled because of his faith and because of his humility. If you want to find out what pleases the Lord, here are two clear characteristics to grow in. Jesus wants us to know him and trust him – to believe who he is and what he says and to actually live in such a way. I've got plenty of room to grow in that one... He also wants us to have an attitude of humility. Romans 12:3 is a good definition: "*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*" Humility is seeing yourself for who you really are and seeing God for who he really is. It's not self-loathing, but it's understanding your sinful nature and helplessness without God's abounding mercy and grace. Anything good in us is because of him. If you think that way, you take the position of lowliness before the Lord – walking in submission to him.

Faith and humility are what pleases the Lord, now I want us to look at another story in chapter 7 where we will see some more. We are going to see a bad example and a good one. One was pleasing to the Lord, one was not, and this story will show us why. It's at the end of chapter 7.

Read Luke 7:36-50.

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. ³⁷ And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, ³⁸ and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. ³⁹ Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." ⁴⁰ And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."

⁴¹ *"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. ⁴² When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" ⁴³ Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged*

rightly.”⁴⁴ Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.⁴⁵ You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet.⁴⁶ You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”⁴⁸ And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?”⁵⁰ And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

So here we have a stark contrast between two very different people, the one a Pharisee and the other a sinful woman of the city – likely a prostitute. One was pleasing to the Lord, one was not. The Pharisee invited Jesus to a meal at his home, but not for good reasons. You can see his critical attitude and unbelief: “If this guy truly was a prophet, he would have known who this woman was and sent her away.” In him you can see the attitude of pride and self-righteousness. He and his associates were much better and higher than this wicked woman. They would never stoop so low as to associate with her. For Jesus to even put up with her proved he wasn’t a prophet of God.

Jesus was clearly unimpressed. His religious standing, knowledge, and legal purity – things that we sometimes think Jesus cares so much about – didn’t matter at all. This story shows us there are things that matter more – much more – to him.

Jesus was pleased with the prostitute. Let that sink in for a while... He wasn’t pleased with her lifestyle – and we don’t know her backstory and why she was living that kind of life – but he was pleased with her expression of love and gratitude... her contrite spirit and humility. Her love for Jesus and deep heart of gratitude led her to go into a house where she knew she would have normally been rejected and embarrassed. It led her to uncontrollable weeping – so many tears she was able to wash his feet with them. It led her to gladly take a position lower than the lowest servant by washing Jesus’ feet with her hair. And it led her to sacrifice an expensive ointment by pouring it on his feet.

And Jesus was clearly pleased with her. You can see some similarities with the centurion – faith, humility, gratitude, love... Those who thought themselves

unworthy of Christ were the ones he was pleased with, while the one who thought himself worthy was not.

Believe it or not, if we want to live lives that are pleasing to the Lord, we need to learn some things from a soldier and prostitute. The attitudes of their hearts are what we need to aim for. Sometimes I think Christians assume that what pleases the Lord the most is their knowledge of Scripture, their record of morality, and their involvement in church. And I don't want to be mistaken – those are good things. But if those are the main things and we're missing the deeper things of the heart, we are not living the kind of life that pleases our Lord.

Jesus said this later on to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:25-26: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean." Man looks at outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. Cultivate the attitudes of the heart – humility, faith, love and gratitude – these are the things that are pleasing to Christ.

Maybe that brings you conviction this morning as you realize that you've been priding yourself on outward religiosity but neglecting the things of the heart. Jesus doesn't condemn you, but he calls you to repent. Confess your pride to him and ask him to transform your heart.

Or maybe this brings you freedom from feelings of guilt you've been carrying around. Maybe you've thought Jesus was most impressed with the Pharisees of the world and you've been beating yourself up for those little imperfections and failures. If Christ can be pleased with a prostitute, do you think he can be pleased with you?

Wherever you're coming from, this message is clear – if we want to live lives that are pleasing to our Lord, we need to cultivate the attitudes of our hearts – grow in faith, love, humility, and gratitude.