

# LUKE—WEEK 9

## SURPRISED BY JUSTICE



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*Luke 7:11–50 — Surprised by Justice*

*The Cover Picture is The Raising of the Youth of Nain  
by Paolo Veronese (1528–1588) on display at Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna*

Jesus raises a boy from the dead—without even being asked. After He confirms to John who He is and explains who John is, Jesus is anointed by a “sinner woman.” He explains that one who is forgiven much, loves much.

This brings in a very important part of the structure of reality and of the gospel.

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Thank you.

Luke 7:11–50 — Surprised by Justice  
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1 Luke 7:11–17 (ESV)

*Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!” and “God has visited his people!” And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.*

This one is different. Jesus is already known throughout the land for His miraculous healing powers. Now He takes this up a notch and raises someone from the dead. Yet, instead of just being excited, everyone is stuck with fear.

This miracle is visually shocking. A bier is just a board, not a coffin. When *the dead man sat up and began to speak*, it looked like a scene from a horror movie. Some of the mourners may have screamed or even fainted. Then *Jesus gave him to his mother*, which surely had a calming effect.

But fear still *seized them all*. It was a reverent fear—the word in Greek (*phobos*) also means awe or reverence—and they glorified God.

But the real kicker is that this miracle was unprompted. No one asked Jesus to do this. He didn’t mention anything about the mother’s faith either. This is bolt-out-of-the-blue grace.

The structure of the gospel is starting to emerge.

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At the heart of the gospel is “surprise giving”—giving things not asked for, things not deserved. Salvation itself is surprise giving. We don’t ask to be evangelized; I was annoyed by it at first. We don’t ask to start believing either. That’s others who are praying for us.

We didn’t ask for it, and we don’t deserve it. The hound of heaven just barges in and raises us from the dead.

Christian means “Christ-like,” and our challenge is always to be more like Him. Of course, Jesus was a surprise-a-minute. We’ll never be that good, but we can try.

But trying isn’t really the answer. Yes, trying to do surprise giving is good and glorifying to God, but only the Holy Spirit can produce deep change.

The key to being more Christ-like is prayer. The process of sanctification is supernatural, and if you want more of the supernatural, you have to ask for it.

Ask the Lord to give you the wisdom and the spunk to be more like Christ.

2 Luke 7:18–23 (ESV)

*The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” And when the men had come to him, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’” In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”*

Notice that Jesus doesn’t give a straight answer to John’s question. Instead, He points out that John’s disciples *have seen and heard* all they need to know. Jesus is using a powerful apologetic technique that’s worth studying. Instead of answering the question, He cites the proof of the answer.

Suppose a policeman asks you, “Were you at the grocery store at 11:00 am yesterday?” “No,” may be correct, but “I passed through TSA security at the airport at 10:59,” is stronger.

Likewise, Jesus’ answer to John’s question is stronger. It also conveys more information. Jesus is filling in just exactly what *the one who is to come* is like.

Of course, some of this is what John already knows; that’s why Jesus’ answer counts as a yes. But John will also hear exciting details of how the messianic prophecies are being fulfilled. Because Jesus instructed John’s disciples to return with an eyewitness report, a dialogue is sure to occur.

That will be an electric moment for John.

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John knew what the messiah would be like because he had done his homework. John knew what the scriptures said. That’s why Christian education is so important to the proper functioning of the church. Knowing the basics prepares people to understand the more advanced (and more exciting) things of the gospel. That’s why churches have Sunday School classes, especially for children.

But this highlights a new and frightening problem for modern churches—many adults coming in don’t know the basics. Some don’t even have the vocabulary. They can’t understand a traditional presentation of the gospel.

Reaching these people means speaking in their terms. Here’s how Paul did it in Athens.

*So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. — Acts 17:22–23 (ESV)*

Notice that Paul *observed the objects of your worship*. That wasn’t easy, but it made his point stronger.

3 Luke 7:24–28 (ESV)

*When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings' courts. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written,*

*"Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you."*

*I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."*

Jesus makes a point here that's so extraordinary most people miss it. First, He says that *among those born of women none is greater than John*. This means John is greater than Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and every other prophet—ever.

Then Jesus says that *the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he*. That means that the most humble worker in the church is greater than John, greater than Moses, greater than them all.

Does it feel like that? When you're working in the nursery, or making coffee, or whatever you do in the church, do you feel greater than Moses?

You should. Your connection to God is more permanent and more secure than his was.

The arrival of the kingdom of God changed everything.

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Consider the many "worker bees" in your church. Do they realize how important they are? Do they know that they are *greater than he*?

*The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. — 1 Corinthians 12:21–26 (ESV)*

Come alongside one of your church workers and give them some help and encouragement. A word of thanks would lift their day.

And check to see if the Lord is calling you to fill one of these shoes for a bit.

4 Luke 7:29–35 (ESV)

*(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)*

*“To what then shall I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another,*

*“‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.’*

*For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.”*

Verses 29 and 30 divide the audience into two groups: those who *declared God just*, and those who *rejected the purpose of God for themselves*, based on whether they were baptized by John. How are those two things opposites, and how does John’s baptism distinguish them?

In verse 29, some translations say, “*they justified God*,” instead of, “*they declared God just*.” This means “they praised God’s justice,” the same way “to glorify God,” means “to praise God’s glory.”

This is in reference to the preceding verse, where Jesus declared that *the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John*. This agrees with John’s preaching, which has always been pointing to “*the one who is to come*.” — Luke 7:20 (ESV)

John’s baptism is a baptism of repentance. The people who have been baptized by John understand that this is all about the kingdom of God. *Everything* is all about the kingdom of God; that’s why *the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John*. God’s kingdom is not man’s kingdom; thus it requires repentance/humility. That’s magnificently just.

The ones who reject John’s baptism reject the whole package, including *the purpose of God for themselves*. They are out of step with everything going on around them. They can’t hear the music and end up just sniping at the musicians.

The rest of the passage paints this picture.

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Praise God for how the gospel is just! Without justice, there would be no need for the cross. Everything would just be arbitrary.

God’s justice and goodness go hand-in-hand. We tend to think of creation as things. But justice is part of the structure of reality. God created a just world. When He created order out of chaos, He invented order.

Imagine a world without justice. Nothing would make sense because there was no such thing as making sense. To people created in the image of God—who have an innate sense of justice—it would be hell.

5 Luke 7:36–50 (ESV)

*One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 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, 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. 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." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher."*

*"A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." 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. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

It's still all about justice. When we think of justice, we normally think that "just" means the guilty get convicted and the innocent get acquitted. "Unjust" is when the innocent get convicted or the guilty get off.

But that assumes the defendant claims he's innocent. When one is repentant (pleads guilty), everything changes. Justice is established perfectly—something mere conviction doesn't do.

Chuck Colson said that in prison it's easy to tell who the Christians are; they're the ones who are guilty. That pokes fun at convicts' claims of innocence. In the kingdom of heaven, all that silliness about being innocent is gone. Jesus' parable implies that the difference between the sinner-woman and Simon the Pharisee is merely quantitative; they both need forgiveness. That should have gotten Simon's attention.

He should have seen his guilt and repented. It doesn't look like he did. He's never mentioned again.

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Every soul lost is a tragedy, but the ones who came close are more distressing. We all know of these "close call" cases. When a loved one fails to come to Christ, it tugs at our heartstrings—especially if they had a moment where they seemed on the brink. It's hard to accept the Lord's will in things like this.

But you never know what He has planned. So don't stop praying. If you need an opportunity to share Christ, ask for that. If you need courage, ask for that. And definitely ask God to change their heart. That part's not your job. But for reasons only He really understands, we're told to pray.

We don't have authority, but we are privileged to be able to come before the One who does.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. How can we do surprise giving?
2. Suppose someone asks you, “Do you really believe all this Jesus stuff?” That’s an exciting opportunity to witness, but also a bit intimidating because of the hostile wording. How do you give a solid answer?
3. How can we encourage people?
4. Why does a just God allow injustice in this world?
5. How do you prepare someone to hear the gospel? What’s your favorite pre-evangelism method?