

Luke chapter 7

I. The centurion's servant

(Luke 7:1-10) When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.

A. The "servant" was a slave. That the centurion was deeply concerned about the man, legally merely a piece of property, speaks well of the man.

3 The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. 4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, 5 because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

B. A centurion is a Roman commander of 100 men, clearly not a Jew. He would likely have moved to Palestine as a soldier, raised in Roman paganism.

C. He clearly had earned the respect of the local Jewish community, but evidently was not a convert. This was unusual among the Romans, who looked down on the Jews. After all, the Jews rejected the Romans gods and thus were seen by the Romans as atheists.

6 So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. 7 That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

D. A strict Jew would not enter the house of a Gentile and the centurion likely knew it.

E. The centurion is an humble man. He could have had the Messiah in his home. But he refused the visit.

F. His humility gave Jesus the opportunity to show the scope of his powers. He didn't have to touch or be present to heal.

G. Just so, our humility helps demonstrate the power of Jesus. We can't take the credit and give Jesus the credit, too.

9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." 10 Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

H. The only other time Jesus was “amazed” is due to the Jews’ *lack* of faith.

(Mark 6:6) And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.

I. The only other person described by Jesus as having “great faith” was the Canaanite women in Matt 15:28—

(Mat 15:24-28) He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." 25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. 26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." 27 "Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." 28 Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have **great faith!** Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

J. There’s no coincidence that the Gospel writers show the great faith of some Gentiles and the weak faith of the Jews, as they wrote at a time (AD 60 to 70 for the Synoptics) when the Jews were largely rejecting Jesus and the gospel was spreading rapidly among the Gentiles.

K. The point of Luke’s including this story is both to show that Jesus’ power is not limited by distance and to show that Jesus recognized and honored the faith of Gentiles.

L. Now, we are not surprised that Jesus could heal at a distance, but this event contradicts any notion that Jesus was a trickster. Healing someone at a distance is impossible if Jesus was merely using the placebo effect or just using his wits to fool the populace.

M. The centurion is an example for us other Gentiles in terms of humility, care for those subordinate to us, and faith.

II. **Widow’s son**

(Luke 7:11-17) Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. 12 As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out--the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.

13 When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Don't cry." 14 Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" 15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

16 They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." 17

This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

A. Luke explains that this was the widow's only son. In Jewish practice, he would have carried for and supported his mother. "Honor your mother and father ..." was interpreted as including financial support in old age. She would have been destitute without her only son—not to mention the emotional toll.

B. V. 13 shows Jesus' compassion. He wasn't just showing his powers. He was genuinely moved by people's suffering. We should therefore be assured that Jesus feels the same now.

C. Jesus' sympathy contradicted the Greek notion of gods. The Greeks reasoned that if the gods really cared about people, then in a sense, people had control over the gods. Therefore, the gods cared not at all.

D. Here we see sympathy in Jesus as a strength, not a weakness.

E. The story shows that Jesus has power even over death.

F. Touching the coffin made Jesus unclean. It just wasn't done.

G. The NIV obscures the meaning of v. 16: "God has come" is literally "God has visited," a phrase used many times in the OT to refer to God himself appearing to the Patriarchs, prophets, and others. The people were declaring Jesus God or an angel.

H. In this and the preceding story, we see Jesus living the Sermon on the Plain—helping people at every opportunity out of a genuine compassion.

I. In fact, Jesus was trying to keep his Messiahship a secret, but raising someone from the dead in a very public way could only bring the authorities in from Jerusalem and lead to an overwhelming press of people looking for healing and resurrection of their loved ones.

J. Luke tells this story to show the depth of Jesus' compassion. He did this because he loved too much not to. He wasn't acting on rules but on emotion and love.

K. It's **CRITICAL** that we learn the kind of man Jesus was from the Gospels, because this tells us who it is that saves us. It tells us how to understand his teachings and commands.

III. John inquires about Jesus

(Luke 7:18-23) John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, *19* he sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

20 When the men came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"

21 At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. 22 So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The **blind receive sight**, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the **good news** is preached to the **poor**. 23 Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

A. "Jesus" was a very common name in those days. It was a variant on Joshua. Yehoshua in the Hebrew. Greek has no "sh" sound and Greek ends nouns with an s. Hence, Yehosus. In German, Y becomes J—Jehosus. The Jews often contracted Yeho to Ye or Yo – Jesus or Joshua.

B. It's not surprising that John couldn't be sure if this was the same Joshua he'd baptized.

C. Recall that Jesus began his ministry with a quotation from Isa 61:1-2—

(Luke 4:18-19) "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach **good news** to the **poor**. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and **recovery of sight for the blind**, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

D. Many contend that John was looking for a military Messiah. Why wasn't Jesus raising an army? John was in prison and perhaps hoping to be among those freed (v. 18 promises freedom for the "prisoners") in the uprising.

E. Jesus emphasizes his fulfillment of prophecy, proving him to be the Messiah.

F. He cautions John not to "fall away" because Jesus does not meet his expectations.

IV. The reed and the palace

(Luke 7:24-25) After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 25 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces.

A. As Wright explains, the image of the reed was on the coins issued by Herod. Jesus was ironically contrasting John to his captor. Herod was rich. Herod lived in a palace. He claimed to be "King of the Jews." But Jesus is the opposite, and his point was that John would surely appreciate the value of being the antithesis of Herod.

(Luke 7:26-28) But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' 28 I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

B. Jesus explains that John was prophesied in Isa 40:3. It's important for Luke's readers to understand that John was not a competitor of Jesus but his forerunner.

C. We read of John having disciples as late as the 4th Century. Not all John's followers immediately came to accept Jesus. Consider Acts 19 and the account of the Ephesians and Acts 18 and Apollos, who were disciples of John.

D. John is greatest of the prophets. He was unique (up to his time) in having the ability to forgive sins through baptism. No other prophet could do such a thing.

E. And so, why are those in the Kingdom greater than John?

(Luke 7:29-30) (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. 30 But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

F. Those who'd accepted John's baptism were humble enough to admit they needed forgiveness.

V. Children in the marketplace

(Luke 7:31) "To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? 32 They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: "'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.' 33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' 34 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and" sinners.'" 35 But wisdom is proved right by all her children."

A. People sometimes judge more by the expectations than their observations. Because neither John nor Jesus is what they expected, the Pharisees rejected them both, although they were very different.

B. Jesus came "eating and drinking." He was no ascetic, which assures us that we don't have to be ascetic either. There is no virtue in denying oneself the pleasures of life purely for the sake of denial.

C. The children of wisdom are those who are also wise or perhaps studying to be wise. If you aren't wise, then you're not a student of wisdom. As the Pharisees

couldn't see that John and Jesus were of God, they clearly lacked wisdom. Rather, they were like children who want what they want just because they want it.

VI. The Prostitute, the Pharisee, and the Prophet (from the blog)

It looked like another night of degradation, of providing sexual favors to men who'd preach her into hell the following Shabbat—men who enjoyed her presence at night but denied knowing her by day. Miriam hated her life and was beginning to hate herself.

As she walked to her usual spot, she saw two women rushing toward the home of Simon the Pharisee. She could just barely hear them talking. "Simon has invited Jesus of Nazareth to dinner! They say this Jesus can do miracles! Some say he's a prophet," the first one said.

"That's nothing," her companion said. "He even forgives sins. At least he says he does."

"You mean, like John the Baptist? Will he baptize us?"

"No," the second woman said, "you don't have to go to the Jordan. He just looks you in the eye and says, 'Your sins are forgiven,' like he's God himself! Some call him a blasphemer. I heard that he thinks he's the Messiah," she laughed as she spoke, "but this Pharisee wants to hear him, so maybe he's the real thing. At least it'll be a good show!"

Miriam's heart leaped at the sounds. "My sins could be forgiven!" she thought. She'd heard of John the Baptist but felt too dirty to see him and be baptized. And now John was in prison and she'd lost all hope of ever being right with God. Maybe this Jesus could really forgive! She knew it was impossible. Any man holy enough to forgive sins would never forgive a woman like her.

She hurriedly followed the women. The sun was setting over the Mediterranean and the houses along the main street were glowing from candles and oil lamps. Soon she saw the entry to the courtyard where Simon lived. And people from all over town were hurrying to see this miracle worker.

Miriam slipped in, pulling a shawl over her hair. She'd spent time with many a man with her hair uncovered. Among Jews, this act of intimacy was reserved for a husband and his wife, and she'd made a great show of letting the men see and even touch her hair. But in the home of a Pharisee, her hair would have to be covered.

She inched her way toward the center of the courtyard. As was typical for the wealthy, Simon's home was built around a courtyard, which opened onto the street. The weather was nice, and Simon was serving his guests outdoors.

They reclined on Roman couches arrayed around a low table. Servants busily brought in food and drink. She could see the dinner companions speaking, but the noise of the crowd

was too great for her to hear this Jesus. She pressed toward the dinner table, and soon found herself looking down at two very dirty feet.

Miriam thought to herself, “This just can’t be! How could anyone come to dinner with a man of wealth and education and recline with dirty feet? Just look at the couch!” Dirt caked on the feet from a day of walking the countryside was dropping onto the upholstery. Miriam had to clean up after the men who’d visited her, and she knew how hard this would be to clean!

But as she looked from the feet to the face of the man, she realized that this was the guest of honor. She was horrified! Simon had been unspeakably rude to this man. If he was good enough to be invited to dinner, he was good enough to have his feet washed! Miriam certainly didn’t expect *her* feet to be washed, but a dinner guest—someone invited to eat with the owner of the house—well, Simon might just as well have spit on him.

She thought of the men she knew. If one of them had been treated this way, they’d have been angry. They’d have left, or they’d have demanded that they not be insulted in this way—especially in front of a crowd. Most would have created scene. What an unusual man this must be? Such ... humility.

She could see the condescension in Simon’s eyes, the barely concealed sneer. She understood men very, very well, and knew this man thought Jesus to be beneath him. And yet Jesus was completely nonplussed. He very calmly and graciously spoke with all the dinner guests. My goodness, he even seemed to be enjoying himself ... enjoying the food, the drink, the company, and completely uncaring about the contempt being shown him. How could a man be like this?

But he was clearly not stupid. You could see it in his eyes. This was a man of insight, even wisdom. And the dinner guests were increasingly fascinated by his words, and yet they seemed increasingly uncomfortable at Jesus’ teaching. This was no ordinary rabbi! Most rabbis spoke in long sentences, quoting from complex traditions, carefully quoting the great men of the past to prove their points. This rabbi was simple, direct, and spoke with authority. He had this amazing self-confidence, as though he feared nothing at all.

Lost in her thoughts, she was shocked when Jesus turned and looked at her. It was just a glance, but she could tell—this man knew her—REALLY knew her. That glance told her that he’d picked her out of the crowd, knew her heart, and—could it be?—loved her. And, she thought, maybe he had even forgiven her! But this was too much to believe. Was her mind playing tricks on her?

She bent to bury her face in her hands. This prophet—perhaps even the Messiah—had looked right at her and had known her, a prostitute, and she found herself in tears.

“This can’t be,” she thought. “I haven’t cried in years. I can’t remember the last time I cried! MEN don’t make me cry. I *use* men to make money. And men certainly don’t get

to me. I'm tougher than that!" But despite her protestations, she found herself racked with sobs.

Now all the eyes in the room were on her. She'd thought herself hidden in the crowd, but this Jesus had made her cry and now everyone was looking at her. And many recognized her! And as the recognition appeared on the faces of the men, the women turned to her with hatred. Sinner!

They all saw her a loathsome. She felt like dirt and wanted nothing more than to crawl out of that room. She should have stayed at her spot and made a little money. Why did she subject herself to this humiliation? She felt foolish and filthy.

And then he did it again. Jesus just turned, looked at her, and smiled—a smile that showed nothing but peace, acceptance, and love. A smile that said, "It's going to be okay."

As Miriam bent over, covering her face with her hands, she again saw those dirty feet. And she became angry. How could such a man be treated so badly? Well, she'd done worse things than clean a man's feet! And everybody already was looking down on her. It couldn't get any worse!

She'd may as well return this prophet's kindness and scrub his feet. After all, maybe she should give up prostitution, and being a foot-washing servant was at least honest labor. It might even be a step up! Maybe the prophet would think she was one of the servants come to wash his feet late and not realize the kind of woman she was.

And so she bent over his feet, caressed them, and looked for bowl and a towel. But there were none to be seen, and no one was bringing any. And then she noticed—her tears were pouring onto his feet, and as they ran down toward the floor, they left clean streaks in the mud.

She reached for her shawl to help wipe his feet. As she pulled it off, her hair fell down. She heard a gasp among the crowd and saw Simon sneer in her direction. He seemed to ALWAYS sneer.

But, she thought, this is the shawl she'd worn while walking the streets. It just wouldn't do. She couldn't touch *this* man's feet with this. She threw it on the floor to wipe up the dirt and tears that had fallen. She didn't care that the crowd had seen her hair. They'd recognized her, and she couldn't be MORE embarrassed.

And since she'd started to wash this prophet's feet, she could hardly leave. He'd think she was as rude as Simon! Besides, the man's feet needed to be washed! It just had to be.

She bent over to consider how she might wipe the dirt with her hands, and some of her hair fell on his feet and left a clean spot. She kissed the spot. She couldn't help herself,

and as she did so, her hair fell over the rest of his feet and made them a little cleaner. And so she kissed his feet again and began to scrub with her hair.

It was the most undignified, improper thing she'd ever done—in public—and she just didn't care. This prophet had been insulted and he'd just smiled and taken it. How could she do any less?

Somehow she felt an intimacy and love for this man she'd never felt for another. He looked at her again and seemed very appreciative. Unlike Simon, there was no sneer, no looking down. He looked at her as man looks at his mother or daughter—like family—and she suddenly felt comfortable. This unexpected and very different intimacy was right. She just knew it. It didn't make any sense, but there was just something about this man.

And then she heard Jesus speak. He told a parable. She really didn't follow it. She was so caught up in emotion, crying and holding his feet, just hoping that somehow this could turn out right.

She half expected Simon to have her thrown out, but Simon was talking to Jesus and seemed caught off guard. The sneer was gone and he looked embarrassed. No one had ever seen Simon the Pharisee embarrassed! At least she wasn't alone in her humiliation!

And then Jesus pulled his feet toward himself and sat up. He turned his gaze toward her, and she warmed to see those eyes again—eyes that radiated goodness and love. She hoped he'd *never* stop looking at her.

“Your sins are forgiven!” he said to her.

She nearly fainted. It was as though her entire life of degradation had disappeared. The impossible came true, and she was so shocked, so relieved, and so thrilled she couldn't even say “thank you.” She just grabbed at her towel, stared at Jesus, and dabbed at the dirt on the floor. She felt she needed to do something!

And then he spoke again, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace!”

And then it hit her. She really was forgiven! Of all the people in the room, the dignitaries, the elders of the synagogue, the dinner guests, the servants, and all the onlookers from the streets, he'd forgiven *her*! What an unusual man! Surely, this was the Messiah! But not the Messiah they talked about in the synagogues—a better Messiah. A Messiah of sympathy, compassion, and forgiveness!

She stood, bowed, and muttered a thank you that he probably couldn't even hear. She was so choked with emotion, she just couldn't speak. But he looked at her again, obviously delighted at her reaction. He seemed to enjoy her forgiveness as much as she did. He just delighted in her joy, and this made her all the happier.

This man could see straight into her heart! She could tell, and she didn't care. Her heart was clean. He could look all he wants, she thought, because there's nothing there to be ashamed of.

VII. The sinful woman anoints Jesus

36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.

A. The Pharisee invited Jesus, so he was somewhat open to his teaching. Perhaps he wanted a magic show. Perhaps he wanted to hear him out.

37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

B. At formal meals, the First Century Jews reclined on a specially designed couch arrayed around the table to eat. It was easy for the woman to reach Jesus' feet.

C. Alabaster was expensive, and perfume much more so. In an age before the invention of soap and deodorant, you can only imagine how precious perfume would be!

D. Jewish women customarily wore a phial of highly concentrated perfume around their necks.

E. Letting her hair down was only the sort of thing a woman would do in private. Normally, her hair would be covered by some sort of veil (1 Cor 11 refers to a hair covering, not a face covering. This is much as we see in many Muslim lands today).

F. When a woman married for the first time, she tied her hair up, and from then on only her husband or immediate family could see it hanging down. Her actions were, in a sense, very immodest.

G. It was customary for a host to have his guest's feet washed. Bathing was not a daily practice and people wore sandals. They likely took their shoes off before entering the house, as there were many animals in the streets and inadequate sewage facilities.

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is--that she is a sinner."

H. The woman was evidently notoriously sinful, perhaps a prostitute or living with a man she's not married to. We aren't told.

I. The woman wasn't a guest, of course, but First Century homes were often open to the street (no front yard) and often the public intermingled in the courtyard that a

house might surround. A meal may be served in a room or in the courtyard, but either way, the doors would likely be open. The Mediterranean climate was mild with little rain and so doors were often kept open and people often ate outside.

J. It was customary that when a Rabbi came to eat the home would be open to listeners. This way his teachings could be shared with the neighbors.

K. Jesus was not only a prophet, he could read Simon's mind!

40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

L. "Teacher" or "rabbi" does not necessarily mean the Pharisee is a disciple, only that Jesus was generally recognized as a teacher.

41 "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. *42* Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

M. It's an obvious question. "I suppose" seems to mean the Pharisee was afraid of being embarrassed and so he was hedging his bets a bit.

N. Of course, Jesus doesn't necessarily mean the Pharisee was less of a sinner than the woman. The more precise answer would have been "The one who is conscious of the largest debt being canceled." You can't be grateful for forgiveness when you don't appreciate your indebtedness.

44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. *45* You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. *46* You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

O. The Pharisee had felt superior to the woman—a sinner!—despite his own rudeness to his guest. Such inconsiderate behavior was contemptible!

P. Men routinely greeted one another with a kiss on the cheek (I'm glad that's not a command!)

Q. Also, a guest would receive a drop of perfume for his hair (from incense or from attar of rose).

47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven--for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." 48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

R. Jesus compassionately and lavishly forgives those he considers worthy, not because of righteousness but due to their reaction to him.

S. Now, it's obviously essential that we be aware of our own sins. We sometimes teach such a tightfisted version of grace that we are afraid to admit even to ourselves how sinful we are (especially when it comes to doctrine, where we often deny that grace even applies). As a result, well, we love too little. It's a bad place to be.

T. How can we become better aware of our sinfulness?

1. Learn to rely on grace, so we have nothing to fear from being honest.
2. Pray honestly to God. We are often reluctant to pray because we hate the feeling that God is looking straight into our hearts. It's good for our introspection.
3. Study the Gospels and compare ourselves to Jesus.

49 The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

50 Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

U. What faith? How did Jesus know she had faith?

V. Why was she willing to express such love of Jesus before she was forgiven?

W. Why say "Go in peace"? She'd been radically changed by her encounter with Jesus. He had no complaint with her. They were in a right relationship.

X. In his question to the Pharisee, Jesus presumes that she is already forgiven, but then he announces forgiveness at the end of the story. How do we reconcile this apparent inconsistency?

1. She'd been forgiven but needed her reputation cleansed by Jesus announcement?
2. She was confident that Jesus would forgive her?

VIII. Also from the blog: this is not in Luke, but still a lesson you may wish to cover. Just a thought ...

The Church Treasury, Judas, and Jesus' Money Bag

It was perhaps the most well-attended elders and deacons meeting ever. The elders had called the meeting to discuss building a new church building, and everyone wanted to participate in such a momentous decision.

There was no choice but to relocate. The city had condemned the building for an interstate extension and had paid very well for the church's lot and building.

One of the elders chaired the meeting and passed out an agenda. The first point of discussion was where to locate. The eldership brought in a member who was a realtor. He'd surveyed the town looking for a site.

"We are fortunate that there are two or three excellent sites available," the realtor began. He put a large city map on an easel with colored marks showing possible sites. "This one will be on an interchange on the interstate once it's built. The owner is a Baptist friend of mine, and he's willing to sell it for \$200,000 an acre. We should buy at least 5 acres." Eyes opened wide at the large number.

"This is a bargain!," the realtor explained. "It'll be worth two or three times that once the interstate is built, but my friend is willing to do us a favor so we can have a very visible, easily accessed location. We'll likely grow 20% just because of having a new building and such a great location."

"But there's also a great location downtown." He pointed to a spot on Main Street. "The bank that's here is merging with another bank and needs to sell its site. We could be right across the street from the First Baptist, First Methodist, and First Presbyterian Churches. ... I guess we'll have to call ourselves the First Church of Christ!" No one laughed. "We can deal with the name later." He paused and caught his breath. The tension in the room was becoming palpable. Money is always tough to talk about, he thought. "This site will cost \$500,000, which is what half a city block costs nowadays. But it will only go up in value, and it will always be in the center of town."

"Finally," he said, "I have a location on the bypass near the car dealerships. This has the advantage of being close to the majority of our members and on a major highway with lots of traffic. We'll have 30,000 cars go past the site a day—it'll be just incredible visibility! And this site will cost \$600,000, but it's a large site with plenty of room to grow. If we expect to grow in large numbers, this site has the most room for expansion."

The elder chairing the meeting thanked the realtor for his presentation. "Are there any questions?" At first, the room was silent. The deacons were clearly unprepared for such large numbers. Their town was growing, and prices were skyrocketing.

Finally, an older deacon spoke up. “We don’t need to run the church like a business! The gospel is attractive enough. We don’t need ‘visibility’ and ‘high traffic counts.’ Those are the concerns of businesses. But we are stewards of God’s money and must invest his money wisely. We have to give an account! If we could buy a site for less money, maybe \$50,000, then we could take the difference and give it to the poor. Sometimes, I think we are too self-centered. We invest all this money in fancy buildings for ourselves, and we forget about our mission to others!”

The conversation immediately turned to a search for other sites. Eventually, a site was found for \$48,000 on a low-traffic side street, with no room for future growth. It was two blocks off Main Street.

The church saved \$450,000 to \$950,000 on its site selection. After the move, it’s budget for the poor was \$1,000 a year, used for transients who happen by asking for a free lunch—unchanged from before the move.

(John 12:1-8) Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. 3 Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

4 But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, 5 “Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year’s wages.” 6 He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

7 “Leave her alone,” Jesus replied. “It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. 8 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.”

When Jesus said “You will always have the poor among you,” he was quoting from the Law of Moses,

(Deu. 15:11) There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land.

Jesus was hardly suggesting that we shouldn’t help the poor! He was only pointing out that the time of his presence on earth was exceptional. Indeed, we are taught in Matthew 25 that we’ll be judged by our treatment of those in need.

In my entirely fictitious story, the deacons argued that the church should not spend money on a better site so the money could be spent on the poor. But in reality, the money

wasn't spent at all. Rather, less money was raised from the members and the members kept the difference.

And so, I ask, what's the difference between the deacons and Judas?