

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 16th November 2025.
The written text may vary from the spoken/video version due to time and flexibility.*



Luke 7 - The Upside-Down Kingdom

Today we explore four stories that show how Jesus is amazed by unexpected faith, restores the broken, meets doubt with grace, and inspires love through forgiveness. Together, these stories show a portrait of pictures that reveal how the kingdom of heaven turns everything upside down, giving opportunity to transform all lives, even the ones that don't fit neatly into our frames.

Introduction: Photo walls

Like many people, we have a photo wall in our house that captures moments of our family story — weddings, births, relationships, even our beloved dog (RIP Millie). We switch the pictures from time to time as life changes, but each one says something about who we are.

As we've journeyed through Luke's Gospel, it feels like we're walking through a similar photo gallery ... snapshots of Jesus' life. In Week 1 of this series, called **King and Kingdom Come**, we looked at a photo wall of the big story. We then looked at a photo wall of Simeon's response to seeing the baby Jesus in the temple, accompanied by some pictures of Jesus' family tree, which gave us a glimpse of Jesus' declaration of who he was. Two weeks ago, we explored six stories that showed how disruptive Jesus really is as he challenged everything normal and invited us to

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see life through the lens of the kingdom of God, a kingdom that flips our assumptions upside down.

Today, I'm looking at another wall. Four pictures, four stories in Luke Chapter 7 that continue to show just how disruptive the **kingdom of heaven** can be for us – that last phrase is used interchangeably with the **kingdom of God** as they both bring to reality the words that we say in the Lord's Prayer, "***Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.***" We're learning that the kingdom of God / the kingdom of heaven, completely upends the way we should be looking at, and living in, our world today.

1. **The first picture we'll look at is the picture of the Centurion's faith in Chapter 7, Verses 1-10**, that shows an outsider showing remarkable faith, and Jesus *marvels* and heals at a distance.
2. **The second picture we'll look at is the raising the widow's son in Chapter 7, Verses 11-17**, where Jesus has compassion and brings life from death; the people proclaim, "***God has come to help His people.***"
3. **The third picture we'll look at is where John the Baptist has some doubts about Jesus in Chapter 7, Verses 18–35**. The prophet wonders if Jesus is who He says He is; Jesus responds by pointing to His actions of fulfilling prophecy.
4. **Lastly, we'll look at the picture of a sinful woman anointing Jesus in Chapter 7, Verses 36-50**, where we see a forgiven woman's extravagant love contrasting with the Pharisee's cold respectability.

Collectively these four pictures show that Luke Chapter 7 is a turning point chapter that vividly demonstrates the character of the King and His kingdom; we get one of the clearest pictures yet of the upside-down nature of the kingdom where faith shows up in unexpected places, compassion reaches those who feel forgotten, doubt is met with grace, and forgiveness leads to extravagant love.

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These picture walls were fast becoming provocative for all who were hearing these stories for the first time, and honestly, they're still provocative for all who hear them today as Jesus reveals the nature of His kingdom — what it looks like, who belongs, and how it overturns some of our preconceptions about who's in, and who's out.

Brace yourself, because this can be uncomfortable to apply, but it's always in that wrestle that real spiritual transformation normally takes place.

Each one of these stories could be its own message, but Luke wants us to see the threads that join them, the bigger portrait of the King and His kingdom.

So, let's look at the first picture frame that could be called...

1. Faith from the outside (Luke 7:1–10)

This story opens in Capernaum, where a Roman centurion, a foreign soldier occupying Jewish territory, sends word to Jesus that his servant is dying. Now, to Jesus and to the rest of the Jewish people of the time, this man should've been the enemy. But instead of arrogance from a Roman soldier, we find humility as he says, ***“Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.”***

Verse 9 says that Jesus was ***“amazed,”*** one of only two times in the gospels where Jesus was amazed, the other time being when he was amazed at the *unbelief* of the people in his hometown of Nazareth in Mark Chapter 6. So quite remarkably, Jesus is *amazed by someone's faith*. And it's not just anyone. This is the faith of a gentile, a soldier, from Rome. It becomes more surprising the more you look at it. You almost couldn't find someone who would be considered more of an outsider than this Romans gentile soldier.

It's dramatic, and yet it's here because it's a picture of the kingdom in miniature. To be part of the kingdom of heaven on earth is not about proximity, ethnicity, or religious credentials, it's

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about *trust* in the Messiah, the Son of God. Faith is not about how close you stand to the temple, it's about how you open your heart to the King.

Can you imagine how this outsider felt to be validated and accepted by Jesus – it would have been incredible to be a fly on the wall! But this is what Jesus does, he breaks down all the barriers so that everyone who is considered an outsider and who yet shows faith in him is ... welcomed.

Every single person has the capacity to find their identity in Jesus. Even _____ (name that person you're thinking of). That's great news if you're listening and feel like an outsider, or an imposter, or if you wonder if Jesus could love someone like you. This story gives you all the intel you need to know that you are created in the image of God for the purpose of relationship with him, through Jesus Christ and today with the Spirit indwelling in us.

Good news! That's the first surprise of Luke 7 - **faith can be seen from the outside.**

As we move from Capernaum to Nain, the gallery shifts from faith to compassion...

2. Compassion that restores (Luke 7:11–17)

This story takes us down the road to a small village called Nain. A funeral procession is leaving town as a widow walks behind the coffin of her only son. You can imagine the grief - she'd lost her husband, and now her only son. She's lost her future and her security, and the crowd is grieving with her.

And then Jesus *meets* the funeral on the road. One procession heading toward death, another heading toward life, and when they meet, life wins. Luke says, ***“When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her.”*** He walks right up, touches the coffin, and says, ***“Young man, get up.”*** And the dead man sits up and begins to talk.

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This is the character of the King. Jesus doesn't just *teach* about compassion, he *interrupts death with compassion*, and we read in Verse 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.”***

I think this is a picture of what Jesus imagines the church to be, a community that meets people on the road of despair and grief and pain and brings a touch of resurrection hope. Folks, that's why we're in the funeral industry with Windsor Funerals, to hopefully be Jesus with skin on to those who mourn; that's why we devote resources to our Church care team and it's why we have significant ministries through Equip and the WP LifeCare Trust – caring for those who struggle with hope is our DNA.

From **compassion that restores**, Luke moves us into a very different emotional landscape — one of ...

3. Doubt that's honest (Luke 7:18–35)

This scene is totally relatable. John the Baptist, who we saw in Week 1 boldly declaring, ***“Behold the Lamb of God,”*** is now in prison. Things haven't gone how he expected and he's changed his tune. He sends his disciples to ask Jesus directly, ***“Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?”***

Even John the Baptist, the prophet, has doubts. And notice that Jesus doesn't shame him. He doesn't say, *“Come on, John, where's your faith?”* Instead, He says to those who came to speak to Jesus, ***“Go back and tell John what you've seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the dead are raised.”***

In other words, look at the evidence of the kingdom of heaven breaking in.

It's so validating to see that even the strongest believers have moments of doubt. It's ok to have questions and not to have answers for everything – I certainly have a few questions that don't

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have neat and tidy answers. But what matters is what we do with those doubts ... do we bring them to Jesus, or do we bury them in silence?

At Windsor Park, I hope we're a community where people can bring their questions and still belong. Because honest doubt, brought to Jesus, can deepen our faith in ways that surprise us.

That's the third picture — **doubt that's honest.**

The last picture we're looking at could be called ...

4. Forgiveness that overflows (Luke 7:36–50)

The final story is one of the most beautiful stories in the Gospels, and perhaps one of the most well-known. Jesus is invited to dinner at the home of Simon the Pharisee. Everything's respectable and polite, until a woman walks in, who Luke says is a **“sinful woman.”** She kneels behind Jesus, weeping, washing His feet with her tears, drying them with her hair, and pouring perfume over them. We might think it's a beautiful scene, but it's not. In its time it's an outrageous scene, embarrassing even. Simon is horrified, but Jesus tells him a story about two debtors, one owes a little, one owes a lot and yet both are forgiven. Then He asks, **“Which will love him more?”** Simon says, **“The one who was forgiven more.”** And Jesus replies, **“Exactly. She loves much because she's been forgiven much.”**

It's outrageously challenging for Simon, perhaps so much so that his response isn't recorded.

What we see here is a beautiful picture of the kingdom of heaven, where the respectable miss it, and the broken find it; where guilt is replaced with grace, and shame turns into worship.

I love that so many people find this story so inspirational. It's really a very dramatic event that holds infinite hope for people who feel that they're not worthy of God's love; this story shows that by remembering and responding to how much Jesus has done for you leads to a life of worship – that's the fourth picture in this montage, a picture of **forgiveness that overflows.**

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Conclusion: The King Who Turns Everything Upside Down

So, four stories. Four surprises.

- A foreign soldier with greater faith than anyone in Israel.
- A grieving widow who receives her son back.
- A doubting prophet who finds reassurance.
- A sinful woman who becomes the most devoted worshipper in the room.

All these unlikely people encounter Jesus in a profound way, each revealing a different facet of who He is ... strong, tender, patient, and merciful. Together they form a composite picture where one clear truth is illuminated: **The kingdom of God is inclusive of everyone that we sometimes think it excludes.** We could expand that thought a little if we really wanted to stretch ourselves: **The kingdom of God is inclusive of everyone that the church sometimes excludes, either consciously or often subconsciously.**

In short: **Jesus disrupts everything we think we know about who's in and who's out in the kingdom of heaven.**

The outsiders, the hurting, the doubters, the sinners; according to these four stories they're all welcome, they're all included, they're all in, they're all loved, and through them Jesus paints a picture of the kingdom of God that is often the exact opposite of something we've often turned the kingdom into. May God give us grace to see people the way He sees them.

Closing Challenge

If Luke 7 was on your photo wall at home, which picture would you see yourself in today?

If Jesus walked through Mairangi Bay today, or down the beach at Browns Bay, or if he wandered down Karangahape Road or through the alleys of Ponsonby, who would He stop for? Who would He surprise you by praising for their faith? Who would He lift from despair, reassure in doubt, or forgive completely?

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That's what His kingdom does. It **welcomes**, it **restores**, it **reassures**, and it leads us into **worship**. And that's the kingdom we're invited to live in.

Maybe you fit one of those categories, or maybe you struggle to think that you could possibly be loved by a God who the church often boxes. But there is no box, in fact the Gospel of Luke shows us that outside the box is where deep life-giving transformation happens.

Do you want to be part of that; you'd be very welcome.

Prayer

Lord Jesus,

Thank you that your kingdom is not built on status, but on faith.

Not on perfection, but on grace.

Teach us to be people who carry your compassion, welcome the doubter, and overflow with forgiveness.

May we be a community where the outsider finds faith,

the hurting find hope,

and the forgiven find joy.

Amen.

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Reflecting on Sunday 9th November 2025:

Last week Caleb used the words Come, Hear, Do, as the basis of an apprenticeship model to follow Jesus. How have those words worked out in your life over the past week ... how have you come to Jesus, or how have you allowed Jesus to speak to you, or what have you done to put your faith into action?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. Where do you see yourself in Luke 7's four pictures? An outsider, grieving, doubting, or forgiven?
2. How does Jesus' compassion challenge the way we see and treat people today?
3. What doubts or questions do you need to bring honestly to Jesus right now and how could you engage in a process to keep growing?
4. Where could forgiveness overflow in your life this week, and what might that look like in action?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed**.

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. Have you ever thought about having a photo wall at home but haven't quite got there? They're a great idea to create some memories and to tell something of your family story, which does require regular updating! Here's an article that might give you some inspiration about doing something artistic in your home: <https://www.houzz.co.nz/magazine/how-to-design-a-family-photo-wall-stsetivw-vs~91044381>
2. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are phrases that are used interchangeably in Scripture. In this article called, What is the kingdom of God?, we see the kingdom briefly introduced to us: <https://www.gotquestions.org/kingdom-of-God.html>. There are also some good links at the bottom of the article where you can read more.
3. Living out the kingdom of God in our daily lives is something worth a lot of thoughtful reflection. In this article called The Kingdom of Heaven Has Come Near, the Theology of Work Project introduces some thoughts that lead us towards thinking about how live the values of kingdom at work. There are some interesting links to take you deeper and further as well: <https://www.theologyofwork.org/new-testament/matthew/introduction-to-matthew/the-kingdom-of-heaven-has-come-near-matthew>