

THREE UNTOUCHABLES

Luke 7:1-10, 11-17, 36-50

by Jan Walsh

Questions to answer for a better understanding of the story

1) ROMAN CENTURION

What was a Roman Centurion?

At the time of Jesus, the Jewish people were ruled by the Romans. Roman army officers who had 100 soldiers under them were called “Centurions.”

What is a Synagogue?

Synagogue comes from a Greek word meaning “gathering.”

It is believed that the Jews first worshiped in synagogues during the Babylonian captivity. They were built to be places of worship where people could take part in reading of Scripture and prayer. Sometimes they served as local courts of justice, and they were also used a place to educate young children. In time, they became centers of community activity & social life for Jewish people.

Even after the Jews returned to Jerusalem and the Temple was rebuilt, synagogues continued to be used. Almost every town in Israel had its own synagogue.

What was the significance of the Centurion building a synagogue for the Jews?

It was completely unexpected that this Centurion, a non-Jew and an officer in the Roman Army would build a synagogue for Jews in the land of Israel.

When the centurion heard of Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to ask him to come and heal his slave. They came to Jesus and pleaded with Him on behalf of the centurion, saying that he was “worthy” of this favor. “He loves our people and he has built a synagogue for us.” So Jesus went with them. This centurion showed his humility when he sent a message to Jesus saying, “I am not worthy...”

Interesting side-light: Only twice does Scripture record that Jesus “marveled” – 1) at the unbelief of Israel and 2) at the faith of this centurion.

- 1) Mark 6:6 “He marveled because of their unbelief.”
- 2) Luke 7:9 Jesus marveled and said to the people, “I have not found so great faith, not in Israel.”

Interesting side-light: There are four centurions mentioned in the New Testament, and all were compassionate and open to the teachings of Christ.

1. The centurion at Capernaum, a man who had greater faith than those in Israel.(Luke 7:9)
2. The centurion at the cross, who declared that Jesus was the Son of God. (Matt 27:54)
3. The centurion Cornelius who was a devout God-fearing man. (Acts 10:1-2)
4. The centurion, Julius, who escorted Paul to Rome. He treated him courteously, saved his life, and gave him as much liberty as possible. (Acts 27-28)

2) DEAD MAN AT NAIN

Where is Nain?

Nain was a small village on the slopes of Mt. Hermon, not far from Capernaum.

What was the significance of Jesus touching the bier?

To touch something associated with death brought ceremonial defilement, which had to be removed by purification before entrance into a synagogue. Jesus, obviously, was not afraid of being defiled by reaching out to help this family.

What is a bier?

A bier is a long piece of wood upon which men carry a dead body. Jesus touched the bier, and spoke to the young man.

3) WOMAN WHO WASHED JESUS' FEET WITH HER TEARS

Why was washing feet such an important issue?

Wearing sandals meant that a person’s feet would be hot and dusty after walking outside, so it was customary to remove your sandals before entering someone’s home. A courteous host would show respect and provide water for washing the feet of an honored guest. Normally a maid-servant would do the job, but if the host himself washed the feet of his guest, it was an act of great humility and affection. This is sometimes still done as a token of hospitality in the East.

What was the custom of kissing a guest?

A kiss on the cheek was a mark of respect or an act of salutation. It was customary in the time of Christ and still is in the East.

What was the custom of anointing with oil?

Anointing the head with oil was an act of respect paid by a host to his most honored guests.

What was the customary way of eating at a table?

The Jews reclined at the table, leaning upon the left elbow, with feet stretched out behind.

Who was this woman?

The woman is not named, and there is no reason for identifying her as any of the women named "Mary" in other passages. These other accounts could be different happenings. Mark 14:3-9, John 12:1-8

Why did she wash Jesus' feet with her tears?

It was unusual for a woman of bad reputation to even come near the house of a Pharisee. The woman's actions and attitude indicate that she had already repented and came to acknowledge her obligation to Jesus and express her great love for the Savior by whom she was forgiven, not having opportunity to do it any other way than by washing his feet and anointing them with ointment (perfume).

Who was "Simon a Pharisee" ?

He was one of the nine men in the New Testament named "Simon."

Nine men named "Simon" (Smith's Bible Dictionary)

1. Simon Peter (brother of Andrew, son of Jonas)
2. Simon the Zealot – another of the disciples
3. Simon a brother of Jesus Matt 13:55
4. Simon, a former leper in whose house Mary the sister of Lazarus anointed Jesus with ointment

5. Simon of Cyrene who was forced to carry Jesus' cross
6. Simon the Pharisee in whose house Jesus ate (Luke 7:36-50)
7. Simon the father of Judas Iscariot (John 13:2)
8. Simon the sorcerer or Magician who tried to buy spiritual power from the apostle Peter. (Acts 8:9-24)
9. Simon the tanner, of Joppa, and friend of the apostle Peter (Acts 9:43, 10:6, 17,32)

Six women named "Mary" (Smith's Bible Dictionary)

1. Mary the mother of Jesus. May have had a sister also named Mary. (John 19:25)
2. Mary (the wife of Cleophas) who stood by the cross on the day of Jesus' crucifixion. (John 19:25) also brought spices to his tomb, etc. She was the mother of James, Joses, Jude, and Simon. (Luke 24:23) Many people think she was the sister of the virgin Mary.
3. Mary Magdalene from the town of Magdala. (Luke 8:2) One who "ministered to Jesus" It is said seven devils were cast out of her.
4. Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus. (Luke 10:40)
5. Mary, mother of Mark, sister to Barnabas. (Col 4:10, Acts 4:36, 12:12) She was among the earliest disciples and lived at Jerusalem. She gave her house to be used as a meeting place. That is where the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples with tongues of fire on the day of Pentecost, and that is where Peter went when he was released from prison.
6. Mary, a Roman Christian greeted by Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (16:6) as having worked hard to help him.

Information Sources
Nelson's Electronic Bible Reference Library
Thru the Bible Commentary
Smith's Bible Dictionary