

When love comes to town

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[0 : 0 0] And if you have your Bibles, perhaps you can open them with me to Luke chapter 7. While we think about what happens when love comes to town, reading this section this week reminded me of that classic U2 song of the same name, sung with B.B. King, the blues guitarist. If you know the song, you will know that it is full of tales, tales of hurts, tales of mistakes, tales of brokenness. But when love comes to town, there's redemption.

And the chorus begins, when love comes to town, I'm going to jump that train. When love comes to town, I'm going to catch that flame. In other words, there should always be a positive response to a love that rescues, to a love that restores when love comes to town. Luke chapter 7 is helping us to answer the question that we've been thinking about for a number of weeks. Who is Jesus?

Jesus. Jesus is the Lord. We've seen that. He is the Son of God. He is the Savior. He is also the King of love who comes to these towns with redeeming and restoring love. And this section also helps us to answer the question, how should I respond to this King? To borrow B.B. King's refrain, we should jump that train. This section is calling us to the positive responses of faith and worship to Jesus the Lord.

These are two powerful stories indicating for us Jesus' love in action. And these are stories that we need to hear. These are stories actually big enough to include all of us. As we have read them, we recognize that whether we are male or female, whether we consider ourselves to be outsiders or insiders, whether we are rich and powerful or poor and weak, there is love from Jesus for us today.

The heart of Jesus is open to show love to you and to me today, so there is good news for us. If we're here today and we're suffering, if we're hurting, if we're confused, if we're searching, there is good news.

[2 : 3 7] The message for us in our time, in Edinburgh today, is that when the King of love comes to town, when he comes to visit us in the gospel, we need to respond with faith and with worship.

So let's think about this. When love comes to these two towns, first of all, let's turn our attention to the town of Capernaum. Verse 1 of Luke 7 reminds us that Jesus is on a journey. When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. So previously we have seen Jesus has called his twelve apostles, and then he has been teaching them as their Lord, and now they're following Jesus to his hometown. They're watching, they're listening and learning, because in the fullness of time they're also going to be called to be doers. They're going to be asked to show the love of God to continue the mission of Jesus. One question to ask is, who does Jesus show his love to? And that takes us to verses 2 and 3, where we meet a centurion and his servant, a Roman army captain. Now, we might have our ideas of what a Roman army captain would be like. The man we meet in this text is surprisingly different. We can notice three surprising aspects about him. Notice, first of all, his respect. He has a great respect for his servant. Verse 2, there a centurion's servant whom his master valued highly was ill and about to die. For many people, servants were disposable, but not for this Roman army captain. But he also has respect for the Jewish people. The Jewish people and the Jewish religion. Look at verse 5. This message comes to

Jesus. This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue. Their place of worship was funded and founded by this Roman army captain.

I would suggest he's also surprising in the humility he shows towards Jesus. Verse 3, the centurion heard of Jesus and sent some of the elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. It's really interesting, and we can miss this, that the centurion, we get a great portrait of him. But to the best of our knowledge, he never actually meets with Jesus personally. Rather, he sends messengers, and when those messengers bring the message to Jesus, this man deserves you to help him. As Jesus comes close to the house, verse 6, he sends friends to say on his behalf, Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. I am not worthy.

Here is humility. In the town of Capernaum, this Roman army captain, he had great influence, so that the Jewish leaders are ready to plead his case. In verse 8, we discover he has great power.

[6 : 05] He has soldiers that he gives orders to, and those orders are obeyed. But before Christ Jesus, he is humble, he is humble. I do not deserve. He's also surprising, and Jesus notices this for us, he's surprising in the understanding that he shows about who Jesus is. Look at verse 7 and 8 with me.

He says, well, his representatives say to Jesus, say the word, and my servant will be healed for I myself. For I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me. I tell this one, go, and he goes, and so on. In the army, this captain knows about a powerful word of command.

When I tell the officers under me to go and do something, I know they will do it even in my absence. And he also says, I understand about a higher authority. And he sees both of these things in Jesus. He understands Jesus has the authority of God himself, and Jesus has this powerful word of command that can bring healing at a distance. He's a surprising figure that Jesus is going to show love to you. Another question we can ask is, how does Jesus show love to this man? I think drawing on what we thought about last week, we can see Jesus show love for his enemies. Remember chapter 6, verse 35, but love your enemies and do good to them. So for many Jews, Rome was the enemy. They were an occupying force, and they were hated by many, but Jesus in his ministry shows grace towards this enemy soldier, just as Jesus' ministry so often shows grace to those who are on the outside.

He shows love with action. Again, Luke records it almost in passing, but look at verse 10, then the men who'd been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. So remember, the centurion understands Jesus can heal by a word of command at a distance. And so as this centurion is sitting at home concerned for his servant, he never meets Jesus, but he sees Jesus in action.

He sees his request miraculously granted. Jesus loves with action. Jesus' love also comes with honor. Verse 9 is really interesting, isn't it? When Jesus heard this, his understanding of the authority of Jesus' word, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd, he said, I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel. There's only two times in the Gospels that Jesus is said to be amazed. First in Mark chapter 6, he's amazed by unbelief.

[9 : 23] How is it that people can witness the works of Jesus, hear the words of Jesus, and stay calm to him? He's amazed by unbelief. But here he's amazed by belief, by belief from someone who is outside of Israel. And what does Jesus do? He publicly honors this man for his faith.

Jesus loves it. Jesus loves it when people place their faith in him. As this centurion trusts Jesus as Lord, entrusts his servant to Jesus' love, Jesus honors him. Jesus honors his faith. Jesus will always honor our faith, however small and weak we feel it to be.

Let's shift from Capernaum to the town of Nain, because the journey continues. In verse 11, we read soon afterwards, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. And the action takes us, Luke takes us to the town gate of Nain. We were in St. Andrew, St. Andrew's yesterday. St. Andrew's has a 400-year-old town gate. There's not actually a gate, but there's a gateway. So perhaps we can think about city walls, and there's a gateway. And at that gateway, Luke records two different crowds coming together. And these two different crowds come with very different moods. There is the one crowd following Jesus, Jesus the King of life and love, and there is joy, and there is praise, and there's expectation. What's Jesus going to do next?

But then there's this other crowd coming out of Nain, and they're following the open coffin of a dead man. And that's a crowd marked by despair and loss and sadness. Now, who does Jesus show love to in the town of Nain? Verse 12, as he has approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. So there is a woman from Nain who is a widow, and now she's lost her son. It's a woman who has experienced multiple losses, the loss of a husband, the loss of a son, and with that the loss of security and income, and the loss of a name for future generations. Multiple losses. And the crowd that follow, they know it.

A large crowd, we're told, was with her. They gather together to show support and to extend sympathy in this time of deep grief. So here we have coming into town the King of love, and here he meets with the reality of death. And wonderfully, this hopeless widow is about to be surprised by joy, about to be surprised by the love of God as we find it in Jesus.

[12 : 46] Now let's stop to recognize how does Jesus show love. Look with me at verse 13. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her. Jesus loves from his heart.

There's been a lot of talk and a lot of studies, especially sort of since COVID, about compassion fatigue. Maybe folks who work in the NHS, sort of feeling that sense of being burned out by repeated demands and needs and so much suffering and it never letting up. There is no compassion fatigue when it comes to Jesus. Here is the power of God for sinners and sufferers. Here is the heart of God for sinners and sufferers. And he never gets tired of helping the hurting and the broken.

It's wonderful to think as well, Jesus sees this great crowd coming, but he doesn't just see a faceless mass. Rather, he sees the one. What we have from Jesus is personal attention to personal suffering. Isn't that good news for us? Jesus would give personal attention to our personal suffering and need. There is love from his heart. There is love, we can say as well, for the so-called least of these.

Luke pairs these stories together, and there's a real contrast, because in society, this woman would be on the very bottom step of the social ladder. If a Roman army captain was up here, then this woman was weighed down here. But to the Savior, there are no little people. Rather, he values her, he honors her, he sees someone made in the image of God, someone worthy of love and care. Our God and our Savior is personal, and he cares for the weak and the suffering. And we see him love with power, don't we?

Here in verse 14 and 15, we're taken into this battle of life and death. And Jesus enters in.

[15 : 24] Jesus went up and touched the coffin they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. In touching a coffin, Jesus should have been made unclean if he were just a man. But what happens with his touch? And with his words, young man, I say to you, get up, the dead man sat up and began to talk.

Jesus has power greater than death. Redeeming love has come to this town. Here is a reminder in Luke's gospel that death. In these two stories we see it as profoundly good news when love comes to town in the person of Jesus. I don't know how many of you have seen the movie Pleasantville. I'm not even sure why Pleasantville came to mind, but I can't remember anything about the story. But I do know that it involved a teenager from the 1990s who was watching a black and white sitcom set in a small town in the 1950s. And in the movie, he is pulled into that town. So he finds himself living in this black and white reality. But as he interacts with people, as he meets with people, as this guy from the 90s walks around, he turns everything technicolor. He begins to transform that community.

What do we see when Jesus comes into the town of Capernaum, when Jesus comes into the town of Nain?

Don't we see his transforming life bringing color, bringing hope, bringing joy in the place of sadness and suffering and despair? That's what Jesus does. That's what he would do in our lives. As we bring these two visits together, as Luke has paired them together, what can we say about Jesus' love today? Well, we can certainly say from these two stories that Jesus' love is open to all. He is a Savior for all, regardless of our country.

Regardless of our social class. Regardless of our career or achievements. There is no small print here.

[18:11] There are no exclusions here. The Bible says, believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. And this is profoundly good news. When we become aware of our sin and our need. When we become aware in our suffering that there is in Jesus one who would love us, one who would help us. It's good news for us when we think about the people on our hearts that we pray for. That the love of Jesus is open to all.

We can also see from these stories that the love of Jesus is gracious. Something I think the centurion understood. As he comes, as he sends his friends to Jesus, he wants to be clear, I am not worthy. He doesn't tell his friends, listen, you need to produce my record of achievement. They don't say to Jesus, see that synagogue. Our friend built that, so you should help him. We shouldn't come. We don't come to Jesus with our record of religious achievements. Jesus, here is why you should save me.

It's all about grace. The very fact that Jesus comes to this dead man shows that we cannot save ourselves spiritually. We are dead in our sins, and we need help. We need resurrection life that comes from outside of us. These stories remind us of God's grace, his love, and his kindness to those who don't earn it, those who cannot deserve it. It speaks to us of God's saving love towards us in Jesus, the Savior.

And this grace, this love is what we need for the whole of our Christian lives. How do we begin? How do we become a Christian? It's by trusting that God loves me, and he sent Jesus to die for me, that he has done everything, and we receive that by faith. How do we grow as Christians? We're not left to do that ourselves, but rather we have the power of Jesus by his Spirit working itself into our hearts and our lives, causing us to become more like us. How do we persevere in our faith until the end? Again, it's because of the saving work of the Lord Jesus, that those at whom God begins to work and those who he chooses to save, he will certainly complete that work and take us to our final destination. Love is gracious, and that's good news. And we see that Jesus is a loving King. So often in the Gospels, we're reminded of this wonderful combination in Jesus, perfect power and perfect love.

That's not something we find in anybody else. I wonder if we can identify with the crowd that met Jesus coming out of Nazareth. So often, don't we, we feel sympathy towards other people, but we recognize there is nothing in the end that we can do for people. We have sympathy, but often we lack power. By contrast, often we think of leaders in the world and they have power, but they lack sympathy for the, for the simple people, for people like us.

[21 : 57] But when Jesus, the Lord, the Son of God, when he comes into the world, when he comes to time, we have perfect power, perfect love coming together. And we see this ultimately when love will come to another type. As Jesus walks to Jerusalem, there, the sinless Son of God will suffer and die in the place of sin. So that all who trust in him will find forgiveness and eternal life.

So we've thought about when love comes to time. Secondly, and much more briefly, when love comes to time, how should we respond? So Jesus is the King and he comes in love. How should we respond?

Let's fast forward to Saturday and to the coronation of the King. There have been, as we know, months of careful planning. There have been practices being carried on at nighttime so that everybody involved on that day will know very clearly, here is the behavior that is expected of you.

The proclaimers, now that group from Leith, they discovered to their cost that if you don't match behavior, you will be excluded. Did you notice that they got ditched from the royal playlist for some of their anti-royal sentiments? I don't think they were too bothered. But when the King of Love comes to town, what is the expected behavior? What behavior does God expect from us in response to Jesus, the King of Love? From these two stories, let's together draw two lessons.

First of all, let's learn from the centurion that we should respond with faith to Jesus. To go back to verse 9, Jesus was amazed at the centurion and said, I tell you, I've not found such great faith even in Israel. What is it that amazes Jesus about his faith? What can we learn for ourselves? Well, we've already said faith that he shows is faith that is humble. If you were to turn to Matthew chapter 8, you would find the same story, but without the messengers. Luke has chosen to include the messengers because the messengers help us to understand here is a humble centurion. This is humble faith. The first set of people come and say to Jesus, he deserves it. And it seems like he's horrified by that idea, so he sends a second group of friends to correct that idea to correct that idea to say, I'm not worthy. Faith must be humble.

[25 : 10] We can think perhaps about the ABCs of faith, which all speak to us of humility. A, faith involves us admitting our sin. And to admit our sin requires us to be humble, to recognize that we have broken God's law, that we have failed to love him and other people as he would ask us to. It takes humility to admit our sin.

Faith must be humble to be to believe that only Jesus can save us, that only Jesus can bring us to God. It takes humility to recognize, I can't save myself. I can't ever be good enough to earn a place in God's kingdom. I must believe in Jesus and trust that his perfect record is credited to my account.

And faith must be humble as well in order to see come to him in faith, to recognize that these things are true, and to not just stand back, but rather to receive this free gift of grace and to come to him. So faith must always be humble.

Faith is in the word of Jesus as well. We saw that at the end of verse 7, but say the word and my servant will be healed. Our trust is in the word of Jesus, the gospel word, that declaration from God of what he has done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ, that he has sent his Son to be that promised Savior, that he has sent his Son, the Lord Jesus, to be the suffering servant. We place our faith in Jesus, who spoke those words of love on the cross, Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing. That's a prayer big enough to include you and me today. We put our faith in the word of Jesus when he declared, it is finished. Everything that is necessary for salvation has been done. All we need to do is come and to believe.

So our faith, too, is in the word of Jesus. And just like the centurion, our faith rests in the authority of Jesus. That's what the centurion recognized. Jesus has a unique authority as Lord.

[27 : 42] By faith, by faith, we see Jesus has come from God with all authority, and faith submits to him and commits to follow him. Faith trusts this message from the King and acts on it.

This message is so different to those scam emails that we probably all used to get in our inboxes. They don't seem to be so frequent anymore. I suspect scammers have become more sophisticated.

But you know those emails you would get where there was a foreign prince who needed your help? He had a vast fortune that he just needed to rest in your account for a little while, and if you would give your bank details, then he would give you a portion of his vast wealth.

We know the action to take to those messages, don't we? That message deserves to be deleted. But Luke's gospel tells us that Jesus really is God's King. He is full of glory and love. He does have the power to transform everything about us, our reality. He really will pour the love of God into our lives. He really does want to give us a spiritual fortune.

What do we do with that truth? At the end of the day, there's really only two choices. We can still hit the delete button. We can dismiss that message. We can ignore that message. We can say, that's too good to be true for me, or that's for other people who are not for me. Or we can choose faith.

[29 : 24] Faith that believes it to be true for me. Faith that comes to him for salvation. Faith that comes to him for help every day. Faith that leads us to pray for others to come and to know Jesus. Faith sees and believes and responds to Jesus, God's King of love. So we should respond with faith. But we're also invited to see that we should respond with worship. And we learn this from the crowd. Jesus is the great teacher sent from God. The crowd on this day. They're like the pupils who almost get it. They've got the facts, but as yet they're not quite able to put them together for a right conclusion. They fall just a little bit short in terms of their understanding of Jesus' identity. Verse 16, they were all filled with awe, and they praised God. A great prophet has appeared among us, they said. God has come to help his people.

So they see what Jesus has just done, raising this boy, and they turn to the Old Testament and think, Jesus is like Elijah and like Elisha, those great powers, those great prophets whom God gave power to, to raise the dead. They think about Elijah and Elisha, who had those great ministries to help restore people to God. And they say, well, Jesus is someone like them. He's another great prophet. But what's the missing link? Jesus is a prophet, and at the same time is more than a prophet. Yes, he speaks God's Word with authority, but he speaks that Word with authority because he is God.

He is the Word of God who became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Jesus isn't just another prophet come to help his people. Jesus is God. Jesus is the promised King.

He has love come down to help his people. Jesus is God's way to restore us to life with God, ultimately by defeating death through the cross and the resurrection.

And because this is true, we are called to worship, to recognize the supreme worth and glory of Jesus, that there be a real change of our heart and our attitude and our actions, because Jesus Christ has become the Savior and the Lord and the treasure of our hearts and lives. He is precious to us. As we come to understand, there is no greater love than the love we find in Jesus, a love that would die to turn enemies into friends, a love that is powerful enough to restore broken lives, a love that can change homes and families and communities as we see here. By faith, we joyfully treasure the love of God for us in Christ Jesus. We live to invite others into that joy.

[32 : 48] That's how living with worship looks. Love has come to town in Jesus, and we need to respond.

We need to jump on that train, trusting Him and living for His glory day by day. Let's pray about that together. Lord, our God, we thank you so much for sending us your Son, the Lord Jesus. We thank you for His wonderful character, for His perfect power and His perfect love demonstrated here in these two stories.

Lord, we're so thankful that Jesus in heaven is still full of power and love, a love that He would pour out on us. And so we do pray that you would give us the gift of faith, that you would cause us to worship you with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength, because of the great love that you have shown to us in sending us Jesus to be Lord and Savior. We pray in His name. Amen.