

The Powerful Word of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Well, over the summer months, we were working our way through one of Jesus' sermons in Luke chapter 6. And I want to just encourage you to imagine for a second that you had been there in that massive crowd.

And that you had heard Jesus speak and say these things. Love your enemies. And do not judge.

And those who hear my words and put them into practice are like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And those who don't are like a fool who built it on the sand without any foundation.

And it will collapse when the flood comes. Imagine hearing those words and then heading into the nearest town for the night with these words on your mind.

And nobody's ever spoken to you like this. Nobody's ever said these kinds of things before. And maybe the question rolling around in your mind is, how can I be sure?

[1 : 0 6] Why should we believe you? I mean, this man Jesus claims that based on how we respond to his words, we live or die.

How can I be sure? Why should we believe you? Well, I believe that this next part of the story is Luke giving us his answer to this question.

We're in Luke chapter 7. Let me just read the first three verses for us here. When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum.

There, a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.

Luke starts by setting the scene. Capernaum was a little fishing village on the shores of Galilee. And this place has, in some sense, been like a home base for Jesus.

[2 : 2 1] In Matthew's gospel, it actually says in one spot that Jesus went and lived in Capernaum around this time. This is where Simon Peter lived. This is where Jesus went into the synagogue and cast the evil spirit out of the man who was in there back in chapter 4.

This is where later that same evening, a whole crowd of people with all kinds of sicknesses and illnesses came to Jesus. And Jesus healed them all. Well, here in Capernaum, the same town, Luke tells us there was a centurion.

Now, the kind of centurion that most of us are probably familiar with is the Roman centurion. You can just kind of almost see the shield and the head thing, the helmet in your mind.

But this particular centurion was probably not a Roman centurion. A centurion was actually a military rank, roughly equivalent to captain. And it referred to a commander of about a hundred men.

And this whole region of Galilee, where Capernaum is, was under the rule of King Herod at this time. He was a client king of the Roman Empire. And under that sort of setup, he had his own Roman-style army and officers, which he inherited from his father.

- [3 : 41] And according to the practice of his father, Herod the Great, Herod's armed forces and soldiers were predominantly Gentiles and foreigners.
- He was very distrusting of the Jews. And so he hired his brute force and his enforcers. Many were mercenaries. Well, this centurion, Luke tells us, had a servant.
- And Luke tells us about the special relationship between this servant and this centurion. He says his master valued him highly.
- Which probably does not refer to monetary value at all, but to having a high regard for him. There's a close relationship with him, a dear relationship to him.
- I was trying to think of some kind of modern day example of this, but the only thing I could think of, and I don't even watch this that much, but Alfred the Butler of Bruce Wayne in the Batman stories.
- [4 : 44] You know, a guy who's clearly subordinate in a servant role and yet dependable and trustworthy and indispensable. A good man who's loved by his master.
- But here's the problem. This servant of the centurion was sick and about to die. It doesn't tell us what the illness was, but it was obviously severe enough that he was about to die.
- And seeing this, the centurion takes action. We read about it in verse 3. We notice that the centurion's action is deliberate and intentional, yet indirect.
- First, it's deliberate and intentional. It's the centurion himself who hears about Jesus. Remember, Jesus has been operating in the region quite a bit, doing miracles, healing all kinds of sicknesses and diseases.
- He's been teaching on the shores. The centurion has heard of Jesus, and he intentionally seeks out Jesus for help. He sends these elders of the Jews.
- [6 : 16] It's deliberate. It's intentional. And yet the way that he goes about this is indirect. Rather than going himself to find Jesus there in the town, Luke says he sent some elders of the Jews to Jesus, asking him to come and heal his servant.
- And at this point we might wonder, why does he do it that way? Why not just go? Why not just go find him? Is he worried about the Gentile versus Jew dynamic?
- He being a Gentile and Jesus being a Jew? Maybe if I send some prominent men of his own people, he'll be more likely to consider? Or is he worried about the soldier versus holy rabbi dynamic?
- You know, I'm a soldier, a man of violence. I've done things that are questionable while Jesus is a holy man. What was going on in that centurion's mind?
- That he sent these elders of the Jews rather than going himself to Jesus? Well, the good news is we find out in a minute.
- [7 : 30] With the setting out of the way, Luke tells us now about the first encounter with Jesus. These elders come with a message from the centurion. And they're there to fetch Jesus.
- We read about it in verse 4. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him. This man deserves to have you do this. Because he loves our nation.
- And he has built our synagogue. We actually learn quite a lot from these few words of the elders. Think about the normal relationship between Jews and Gentiles.
- Normally, Jews look down upon Gentiles and saw them as unclean. Even more so, a Gentile soldier. And even more so, one who is in the service of Herod.
- The Jews were not particularly fond of Herod. And yet surprisingly, these elders of the Jews there in Capernaum seem to regard this particular centurion, this Gentile, very highly.

- [8 : 34] This man deserves to have you come and heal his servant, they say. Why? Because he loves our nation.
- Even more than that, he built our synagogue. So this is not your typical hardened Gentile mercenary captain.
- It appears from the elders that this centurion is quite the man. He's been a great friend to the Jewish people where he lives. Not only that, but he's even built the local synagogue.
- Can you imagine them? Working together, side by side. They say he loves the nation. He might not have been a full convert to Judaism.
- But it seems from this at least, that he was a kind and God-fearing man. And everybody in town knew it. But this man deserves to have you come and heal his servant, they say.
- [9 : 44] If anyone is worthy of a miracle here, it's him. And so, verse 6, Jesus went with them.
- But then, before Jesus arrives at the centurion's house, he receives a second message from the centurion. 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. That's why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.
- Okay, this is unexpected. If you've never heard this story before or read this before, you know, we kind of just assumed at this point that Jesus is going to go right to the house, lay hands on the man, say, be healed, and he's going to be healed, and off we go.
- So, the first message was, come and heal my servant. And now Jesus is almost at the house, and the centurion sends his friends out to tell him, don't trouble yourself.
- [10 : 55] Don't come into the house. Don't come into the house. Don't come into the house. Don't come into the house. And the reason is astonishing. For I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.
- That's why I didn't even consider myself worthy to come to you. Wow. Now we know why the centurion was so indirect before.
- Why he sent the elders of the Jews. It wasn't because of some Jew versus Gentile dynamic, or because he thought the elders of the Jews would be more likely to convince Jesus to come and do this.
- This was the reason. I didn't come to you myself, because I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. Do you see the irony in all this?
- What were the elders of the Jews saying about the centurion? This man deserves to have you do this. He's worthy.
- [12 : 05] And what's the centurion saying about himself? I don't even deserve to be in your presence, Jesus. I am unworthy. Amazing.
- This centurion, this commander of a hundred men, a man of influence and power and strength, and yet he has such humility, reverence and humility before Jesus.
- First it was come and heal. Now it's don't come into the house. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.
- For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, go.
- And he goes. And this one, come. And he comes. I say to my servant, do this. And he does it. Amazing.
- [13 : 19] Don't come all the way to my house. I'm not worthy to be in your presence, Jesus. Just say the word. And my servant will be healed.
- This is astonishing. What does he believe about Jesus? Well, he obviously has complete confidence that Jesus can heal his servant, even though he's on the brink of death.

But it's even more than that. He doesn't think of Jesus' power to heal as being anything like a doctor's. With a doctor, you first need him to come, examine the servant, assess his condition, diagnose his illness, figure out what's wrong, and then the doctor will tell you whether there's anything that he can do.

And I suspect many would have thought the same about Jesus. You know, I've heard he can heal all sorts of things, but what about my condition? Or what about the condition of my loved one?

Probably some things are beyond even Jesus' power to heal, some probably thought. But not this centurion. He didn't think of Jesus' power to heal as being anything like that.

[14 : 38] In his mind, whether Jesus could heal a person or not had nothing to do with the seriousness of the condition. Rather, it was in his mind a matter of authority.

Whether he can truly heal anyone has to do with who he is and what kind of authority he has over sickness, over the body, over life.

And amazingly, the centurion, just from hearing about the things Jesus has been doing in his region, came to believe something amazing about who Jesus really was.

He believed it so much that when he came to be in need of this miracle for his servant, he looked to Jesus, he asked him to come, but then said, don't come all the way, just say the word.

Lord, and my servant will be healed. I don't know about you, but my eyes would have been wide in this moment had I been there listening to this.

[15 : 46] Like, hold on a second. Does he really believe that right here and now Jesus can just say the word and the guy lying in bed over there in the house will be healed?

Doesn't Jesus want to come and see how bad it is? Nope. Not necessary, says the centurion.

And the explanation of the centurion is wonderful. His understanding of all this is filtered through his own experience as a captain, as a commander.

He's understanding Jesus' relationship to the sickness through his own experience, his relationship to his men and to his servants.

And it comes down to this for him. He says, it's a simple matter of authority. Because I have authority over my men, I tell them what to do and they do it.

[16 : 54] That's the way it is with you, Jesus, and the sickness in people's lives, in their bodies. You have authority over the sickness itself. You tell it what to do and it does it.

And therefore, it really doesn't matter whether you're in the house or out there or where you are, Jesus. Just say the word and my servant will be healed. Look at the response of Jesus to this second message.

Verse 9, when Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him or he marveled at him and turning to the crowd following him, he said, I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.

I love this. Jesus is just so deeply impressed, so moved by the centurion's faith. He turns and announces it to the whole crowd just how wonderful this is.

All of them knew where Jesus was going by now. They probably heard the elders pleading earnestly, come heal this man's servant. Probably lots of them were thinking, oh, this is going to be great.

[18 : 06] Jesus is going to heal our dear centurion's servant. And the next thing we know, the parade's over. No, we're not going into the house anymore.

Nope, the centurion said, don't trouble yourself. He said, just say the word and my servant will be healed. I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.

Some of the Jews have had faith in Jesus, but not like this man's. This man understands and believes things about me and about my father that no one else does even in Israel.

At least not yet. I got thinking about this. You know, it's quite the thing for Jesus to say. I haven't seen faith like this even in Israel, even among the Jews.

Think about this. Who has Luke introduced us to so far in the story? The priest, Zachariah, who served in the temple of the Lord.

[19 : 20] And what was his response when an angel appeared to him and said, you're going to have a son? He didn't believe it. This Gentile captain in Herod's army had greater faith than Zachariah the priest.

What about Mary? The mother of Jesus. Surely she's an example of someone in Israel who had great faith.

After all, she didn't doubt what the angel said to her. She just asked about how it would come to pass. But then this centurion didn't even think it necessary to see or discuss the how.

you have the authority of God to heal. And so say the word. Wherever you are, it will be done. What about John the Baptist?

We've heard a lot about him. He was a prophet of God. Surely he has greater faith than this Gentile centurion. Well, in a few weeks' time, just glance down the page to verse 20.

[20 : 25] We're going to see that even John the Baptist wrestled with doubt when he saw how things were going with Jesus. I don't think Jesus is exaggerating here when he says, I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.

this humble Gentile centurion has a better understanding of who I am than anyone I have come across so far here in Israel, than any of my own people, the Jews, than all of the elders, than the Pharisees, than the priests, even the chief priests.

How did it come to be that this centurion has greater faith in Jesus than everyone else in Israel? Well, there's a behind-the-scenes spiritual answer to this question, and I don't want to go on without acknowledging that.

As Jesus said on one occasion, John 6, verse 44, no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him or draws them. So there is that sort of work of God, that unseen drawing of God, the opening of eyes, the giving of faith.

That's the behind-the-scenes spiritual answer to how this centurion came to have the faith that is so great in Jesus, greater than anyone in Israel. But in terms of the visible and the tangible things, how did it come to be that this centurion has greater faith than anyone in Israel?

[22 : 08] Think about this. He had not had more private one-on-one time with Jesus than anyone. More conversations.

He hadn't even met Jesus face-to-face. We might have thought that the twelve disciples should have the greatest faith simply because of the amount of time that they spent with him and the sheer volume of miracles they witnessed and the teachings that they heard from him.

But no, that's not it. This centurion had greater faith than Peter, than James, than John. How could that be?

What had the centurion heard and seen about Jesus? even though it was much less than many, yet he knew and believed much more about Jesus than anyone in Israel.

How could it be? I gave the spiritual God drawing him and revealing it to him part of the answer, but I want to think of this from the very human perspective of the centurion himself.

[23 : 16] What had he heard about Jesus? Up until this point in the story, not too much. He had maybe heard some of the teaching of John the baptizer that someone special was about to come, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

He had maybe heard Jesus' simple declaration which we read about in the Gospel of Mark. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. He had maybe heard by now of how Jesus was claiming the fulfillment of the great prophecies of old from the Jewish scriptures just like he did in Nazareth there in the synagogue and probably elsewhere.

He'd maybe heard some of these early teachings of Jesus which we just looked at in this sermon of Jesus in Luke chapter 6. But other than that, he had likely heard of how Jesus had been healing people and casting demons out of people.

All kinds of people. But it would seem that this centurion paid more attention and deeper attention to these things than others did.

Think back over some of these things Jesus did when he healed people, when he drove out demons. How did Jesus heal and drive out demons in chapters 4 and 5?

[24 : 44] He ordered the evil spirit to come out of the man in the synagogue and it came out. Likewise, Jesus rebuked the fever of Simon's mother-in-law and it left her.

He said to the man with leprosy in chapter 5, Be clean! And immediately the leprosy left him. He said to the paralyzed man on the mat who was lowered through the roof, Your sins are forgiven and I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

So I'll heal this man, I tell you. Get up, take your mat and go home. And he stood up. He was healed and he did as Jesus said. All along what the centurion has come to believe about Jesus has been there.

visible in how Jesus has been doing all these miracles. You can imagine the centurion just standing back and thinking over all these things.

Just like I tell my men to go and they go or to come and they come. This man, Jesus, tells sicknesses to go and they go. He tells demons to come out and they come out.

[26 : 06] all of these things that Jesus did were great signs and what I'm getting at is this. The centurion simply followed the signs to their destinations.

Many, it seems, saw the miracles of Jesus and went, oh, wow, that's amazing. Could he be the Messiah?

I don't know. But let's see some more. It's like they were caught up in this sensational show. But many were not stopping to really think about what Jesus' ability to do all these miracles in this way was really saying about who he was.

but the centurion wasn't missing it. Some of the twelve disciples, I mean, they came to these conclusions quite early on that Jesus was the Messiah and yet we see throughout the story their notions about the Messiah and how the story would go kept getting overturned and yet here's this Gentile centurion, an outsider to the prophets and the scriptures and the faith of the Jews and he's been watching Jesus and thinking about what Jesus is doing and how he does it and he's come to the conclusion that Jesus has the very authority and power of God to heal, to save, to restore life.

and it's not some sort of you know pagan magic or ritual where you just got to say the right stuff or use the right ingredients, the right herbs like a witch doctor.

[27 : 56] No, this Jesus has the very authority and power of God. Look at what he's doing. Just like the creator God, he declares and people are healed.

They're restored completely. If he says the word because of who he is, therefore my servant can be healed too. That's a greater conception of the Messiah than probably anybody in Israel had at this time.

They were looking for that great human king sent by God and backed by God, yes, but still very much an ordinary man come to rule over a typical earthly kingdom but greater, to free us from the Roman rule and the rule of Herod and take us back to the glory days of Israel.

But this centurion was already seeing something far greater in Jesus. Not just a great king from a worldly point of view.

No, this man, he actually has and wields the very authority of God. And if he has that, he can do as God can do for my servant.

[29 : 18] Just say the word. Behind the miracles of Jesus, there is a meaning. There is a significance to them. We all too easily get caught up in the sensationalism of the miracles. and then once we get really familiar with them, we lose that. We get bored of them because we want the ooh, we want the ah feeling that we had when we first heard about them.

But in doing this, we miss the significance of them. The miracles are signs, like a sign on the highway that points to a destination.

It points to a reality about Jesus, something true about him. And these realities are so great and glorious that we can never get over them. They never get old.

And this centurion had laid hold of one of these realities by faith, the reality that Jesus really does have the authority of God. How does it end?

[30 : 24] Verse 10, Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. so Jesus does heal him from a distance by the authority he has.

He doesn't go to the house. The elders do. Think about this whole day from the perspective of the elders. Starting off, meeting with the centurion, seeing the servant about to die, going to Jesus, please come.

And they finally get back to the house without Jesus and the servant is well. that word means completely fine. No sickness, no illness, nothing wrong with him.

Do you know who Jesus really is? That he is the very son of God, the one who has the authority of God.

after Jesus rose from the dead, he said this to his followers. Matthew 28, verse 18, then Jesus came to them and said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

[31 : 49] Many of us who are Christians for a long time know these words, but we are eager to get to the part that we do. Let's pause and just reflect on these words. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, said Jesus.

Not just the authority to heal, to restore life, to cast out demons, to calm storms, but all authority in heaven and on earth.

He is Lord of all. He is one with God. He is God overall, king overall.

And not just the stuff down here on earth, but also the stuff way up there that we see through the telescope. He's over that too.

That stuff listens to him too. and one day he will bring this world into its proper place before him and he will rule down here visibly and tangibly as the king of all kings, displaying the full measure of his power and of his authority.

[33 : 05] Do you know who Jesus really is? have you followed the signs to the realities, to the destinations?

Great faith in God is not reserved only for the Jews, nor is it only for the prominent, the elders, the priests, the pastors, the preachers.

you can have great faith in God too. Look to Jesus. Follow the signs that he has given. There's so many ways that we can be encouraged by this.

None of us has a sick servant at home, but what's the trouble or struggle or problem in your life right now? About which you could come, call out to Jesus and ask him to come and help.

Are you seeking his help? Do you believe that he can do something about this? Have you asked him? Or maybe it's worry, anxiety, panic about all sorts of things, and yet do we need to worry or fret about things when the one who has all authority in heaven and on earth is willing to come and visit us and intervene with grace in our lives.

[34 : 42] There's so many ways that we can be encouraged by this, and I hope you'll think about these things this week. But this Sunday as we come to the table, we're just going to focus very quickly on one particular authority of Jesus, which is especially precious.

And it's that authority to forgive us of our sins. I had a good conversation with a brother just recently in which we shared about some of the sins that we had in our past.

They are many. we need a remedy. We need someone who can cleanse us of those things and forgive us of those things.

Praise God, he has sent his son Jesus into our world with authority to forgive our sins. The table that we're about to partake of reminds us of how this works.

He had the authority to forgive us, but it was contingent upon his willingness to take what we deserve, our punishment on himself.

[36 : 09] This is what happened at the cross when Jesus died. He allowed his body to be broken and his blood to be shed.

That's pictured in the bread that we're about to eat, which is broken and given out, and the cup that we're about to drink. His body was broken and his blood was shed to atone for our sins.

the cross and what Jesus did there for us undergirds his authority to forgive us of our sins.

Sometimes we get so used to hearing about this, it becomes so familiar, but we forget this was absolutely necessary so that we could be forgiven.

we needed a new arrangement, a new deal with God, a new relationship. He had to suffer. He had to die as he did to get us off the hook with God, to take away that punishment that we deserve.

[37 : 22] And so that's what we want to remember, that's what we want to celebrate again this morning as we eat and drink of the bread and the cup that Jesus came and he did that for us. We're going to take a few minutes now of quiet to reflect, to pray, talk to God in these moments, and then we'll have some of the men come up and pass out the elements.

If you have faith that Jesus really is the one in charge of all, that he has done this to save you, then I invite you to please join with us and eat and drink with us in these moments.

And if not, please just let the bread and the cup pass you by. We wait until everybody has been served, and then we'll give thanks together and we'll partake all together.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.