

AM Luke 7:1-17

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[0 : 0 0] Well friends, it's good to be with you on another Sunday morning that we still can't meet together, but it's good that we have God's Word, it's good that we have, as Christians, God's Spirit indwelling us, and as we come to the Word, we pray indeed that God's Spirit would enlighten us, we pray that God's Spirit would soften our hard hearts, we pray that God's Spirit would indeed, that the Holy Spirit, that He would unstop our deaf ears, remove the scales from our eyes.

Well as we come this morning, let's bow our heads and pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for another Lord's Day, we thank you for the opportunities that we have, we thank you for the goodness and the kindness and the love that you show to us.

We pray for all of our medical staff, that you would continue to grant them health and safety, we pray that you would continue to grant those researchers who are searching for a vaccine, that they would have success in their endeavours, that you would continue to keep your hand upon our leaders, continue to keep your hand upon us, and we pray Father that you would be with us now as we come to your Word, that you would give us insight and understanding, that we would have clarity of thought, and clarity of mind we ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well let's turn this morning then please to Luke chapter 7, Luke chapter 7, and we're going to consider this next section, verses 1 through 17. Luke chapter 7, verses 1 through 17.

Let's read it together now. Now, after he had finished all his sayings and the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. Now, a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him.

[1 : 4 1] When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who has built us, our synagogue.

And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

Therefore, I did not presume to come to you, but say the word and let my servant be healed.

For I too am a man, said under authority, with soldiers under me, and I say to one, Go, and he goes, and to another, come, and he comes, and to my servant, do this, and he does it.

When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him. And turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

So afterward, he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.

[2 : 5 2] And a considerable crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, Do not weep. Then he came up and touched the bear, and the bearer stood still, and he said, Young man, I say to you, arise.

And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, A great prophet has risen among us, and God has visited his people.

And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. Amen will be beneficial for us, it will be good for us, if you have that passage open in front of you, so that we can study it together, so that we can see what God is saying to us together through his word.

We all have those little advertising slogans that are stuck in our head, don't we? Those little advertising slogans that are so good, because they just bury themselves in our heads.

We might think of the iconic Nike, just do it slogan, and that slogan that if you say, just do it, everyone associates it with the Nike sportswear brand. We think of Coca-Cola, and the advertising slogan that always comes to my mind is I think about Coca-Cola is always the real thing.

[4 : 13] Perhaps that's not really your bag, perhaps that's not really what you think of, but there's that little advertising slogan stuck at the back of your mind that says that the car in front is a Toyota.

In Northern Ireland we used to have a supermarket when I was a wee boy, we used to have a supermarket called Crazy Prices, and its slogan was, my mum's driving me to crazy prices. They work because they're simple, they work because they're memorable, they work because they bury themselves in your head, and as soon as you hear that slogan, you know the brand. That's what makes them successful.

The one that came into my head as I was preparing this sermon was L'Oreal, and what has their slogan been over the years? Their slogan has always been, because you're worth it. Because you're worth it.

And as we come to Luke chapter 7 this morning, as we come to these verses 1 through 17, that gets us right to the heart of this passage, doesn't it? It gets us right to the heart of the Jews' argument with Jesus, of the Jews' statement to Jesus.

[5 : 15] They want Jesus to come and see this centurion's servant. Why? Because he is worth it. He's done great things for our nation. He's helped build our synagogue.

He is worth it. But in response to that, what does the centurion say? What's his argument? And essentially the centurion says, I am not worthy.

Jesus, don't come under my roof. Don't come to my house because I'm not worthy. You just say the word. You just make the statement, I know that it will be done.

Then we come to the widow, this last section that we see. And there's no indication of whether she's worthy or not. There's no indication of her goodness or not.

All that's recorded for us wonderfully. All that's recorded for us is that Jesus had compassion on her. We want to think about three things this morning.

[6 : 20] We want to see three things this morning. First thing, we want to think about a good man. We want to think about this centurion. We want to see that he is actually a good man. Secondly then, we want to think about a faithful man.

How this centurion actually sees himself. He's faithful to the Lord and faithful to himself. And then thirdly, finally, we want to remind ourselves about a dead man.

This young man who's dead. This widow's only hope of making a living. This widow's only hope of surviving. And how Jesus has compassion on her. Firstly though, we want to think about a good man.

A good man. We see that in verses 1 through 5. Verses 1 through 5. A good man. So remember where we are in Luke's Gospel. Remember where we've got to in Luke's Gospel thus far.

Chapter 6 was the so-called Sermon on the Plain. This great body of teaching. This period of teaching where Jesus begins to explain to his disciples, his followers, what it will mean to be a part of his kingdom.

[7 : 20] What it will mean to be a follower of him. We saw how Jesus in many respects turns everything upside down. How we remember Jesus says, well, it will be blessed to be poor.

It will be a woe to be rich. That the hungry would be satisfied. That the fool now would go empty. We finished last week by saying Jesus' instruction that we're to build our lives on his teaching.

That we're to be not only those who hear the word. But we're to be those who do the word. Not only those who listen to what Jesus says. But we're to put it into practice. Both the rich, both the wise and the foolish man, sorry, heard the words of Jesus.

But only the wise man built his life upon Jesus' teaching. And that's the context then as we come to Luke chapter 7 this morning. That's the context as we come to verse 1.

Because what do you read in Luke 7 verse 1? After he'd finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people. After he'd finished this teaching. After he'd finished the so-called Sermon on the Plain. He goes to Capernaum.

[8 : 23] And it says Jesus is in Capernaum then that we're introduced to this centurion in verse 2. This centurion who had a servant who was sick. And note again what Luke the doctor records for us.

Note again what Luke the physician records for us. That this servant was sick unto death. That this servant was sick and was at the point of death. We can probably all relate to that. Especially at the moment can't we? There are people who are sick. And then there are people who are really sick. This wasn't just that this servant had a little sniffle. This was that the servant was on a ventilator looking for help. This wasn't just that the servant had a little upset tummy bug. This servant was at the point of death. And Luke also tells us that this servant was loved by his master. He was valued by his master. And the centurion hears about Jesus. He hears about all of the things that Jesus has done. [9 : 28] He hears no doubt about all of the things that Jesus has said. He hears about all of the miracles. He hears about all of the healings. And he starts to wonder well could Jesus help me? Could Jesus help my servant? Could Jesus do anything? Could Jesus do something in this situation we're in? And notice what he does. And it shows that the centurion is fundamentally a good man. It shows that the centurion fundamentally understands what's happening. Because what does he do? Verse 3. When the centurion heard about Jesus. Notice what he does. He sent to him elders of the Jews. Asking him to come and heal his servant. He's aware of the religious sensitivities. He's aware of what it might look like for a probably Gentile soldier to go to Jesus. And so he gets the Jews to go. He's conscious of the religious sensitivities that are going on. [10 : 24] And he goes to the Jews and says look. Would you go to Jesus for me? Would you go and see if he can do anything? Would you go and see if he can help? Go and ask Jesus if he can do anything. Go and ask Jesus if he can heal him. Go and ask if Jesus is prepared to come and help my servant. Go and ask Jesus. I don't miss that. We're going to find out in a few moments time. This is a man who's used to giving orders. This is a man who's used to telling people what to do. This is a man who's used to having people under his command. And yet it isn't the order that's given to the Jewish leaders. It isn't go and do this for me. It's well. Would you? Could you? Could you? Could you go and ask Jesus? Notice again that the order isn't given. Tell Jesus to come and heal my servant now. No. [11 : 30] He says look. Can you? Can you ask Jesus? Do you think he would be prepared to come and do it? And it shows a real attitude of humility, doesn't it? It shows a real attitude of groundedness, if you like. Here is the leader. Here is the commander of a battalion of soldiers. Here is a Roman centurion asking for help. Prepared to put himself under the help of another. The example that came to mind as I was preparing this sermon, the kind of the opposite of it, if you like, was that of Naaman, another Gentile ruler, another military commander, another powerful man who had leprosy. The little servant girl of his wife tells him and says, look, there's a man in Israel who might be able to help you. There's a man in Israel, a prophet in Israel, who might be able to do something for you. And remember how Naaman reacts when Elisha gives him the prescription, when Elisha tells him what to do? He, in effect, says, doesn't he know who I am? Doesn't he know the power that I have, the arrogance of a Gentile leader, compared here with the humility of a centurion? [12 : 42] So that's the plan. The religious leaders are going to go, they're going to ask Jesus, they're going to say, look, will you come and help? Will you come and do something for this centurion's servant? Will you come and healing? So they arrive to Jesus, verse 4, and they plead with him earnestly. And notice the phrase that they use. Notice what it is that they say about him, verse 4. He is worthy to have you do this for him. He is worthy of your help. You may remember a few years ago in the United Kingdom, there was a great deal of debate around the honor system. Essentially it was around the time of the collapse of the Royal Bank of Scotland. There was a great deal of debate about whether Sir Fred Goodwin deserved to keep his knighthood or not. Was he worthy of a knighthood? Was he worthy of this great title, given the economic impact that he'd had upon the Royal Bank of Scotland? Was he worthy? But why is he worthy?

[13 : 45] The religious leaders come to Jesus, verse 4, and they say, look, he is worthy, but why? Verse 5. For he loves our nation, and he is the one who has built us, our synagogue.

There's some debate about what exactly is meant here. Some people read verse 5, and they say, what's meant is that this centurion paid for the building of the synagogue. He was the one who bankrolled the whole of the project, if you like.

There might be some truth in that. Others say that he sort of oversaw security, that he greased the wheels of power, if you like, to ensure that the Jewish people in Capernaum could buy the land, could get the synagogue built.

He greased the wheels of the Roman power, if you like. In my mind, there's probably some combination of both of these things going on there, that the centurion undoubtedly contributed to the building of the synagogue, but he also undoubtedly made sure that the right people knew that this was a good thing, that this was a worthy thing to be done.

But what I want to draw out is that for the religious leaders, that is what made him worthy. How he'd acted, what he'd done, how he'd helped them, was what made him worthy.

[14 : 58] He has acted this way, therefore he's worthy of your help. He's done these things for us, therefore he is worthy to have your help.

And you see, friends, that's what every other major world religion says, isn't it? That if you do enough good things, that if you live a good enough life, that if you live a clean enough life, if you accrue enough good deeds, then you are worthy, then God is bound to accept you, God is bound to help you.

If you do enough good things and live a good enough life, then Allah is bound to welcome you into paradise. If you do enough good deeds, if you live a good enough, clean enough life, then you can finally be freed from this existence and absorbed into the eternal flame.

And that's one of the things that marks Christianity out that is fundamentally different from every other world religion, isn't it? One of the things that makes Christianity unique amongst world religion.

Because Christianity says, you see, we know we're not good enough. We know that we can never work our way up to God. We know that we can never do enough good deeds to make ourselves right with God, but that Jesus Christ, through his life and death in our place, has made us right with God.

[16 : 16] So which religion are you following this morning? What is your religion this morning? Is it the religion that says, save yourself? Is it the religion that says, well, I've done enough good deeds, I've accrued enough merit over the course of my life, I'm worthy of being saved?

Or is it the religion you're following this morning, the one that says, well, I know I'm not worthy. I know I never could be worthy. But there is one who is. There is one who's lived and died in my place.

There is one who pleads my case from God's right hand this morning. So that's the religious leader's basic argument. Look, this is a worthy man.

This man is worthy because of his good deeds. Secondly then though, we want to see a faithful man, a faithful man. And we see that in verses 6 through 10. Verses 6 through 10. So the religious leaders have laid out their case.

They've set out their stall. He is a worthy man. He's a good man. Let's see what happens next.

Verse 6, Jesus goes with them. He obviously sees that this man is a good man.

[17 : 23] He obviously accepts the religious leader's designation of him. And he accepts the fact that this man does good for the people. They're drawn near to the house when suddenly they're met by another one of the centurion's friends.

Now why doesn't the centurion go himself? Why does he send, notice this time actually, notice that he sends not a servant, but friends. He sends not somebody under his command, but somebody that he trusts, somebody that he respects.

But why doesn't he go himself? Well, we see why in verse 6, don't we? The centurion sent friends, saying to him, Lord, do not trouble yourself. Why?

For I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. This centurion, as we've said, so aware of the religious customs of the day, so aware of the religious sensitivities of the day, says to Jesus, look, don't come under my roof.

I'm not worthy. I'm not good enough to have you come under my roof. He's aware that Jesus would be making himself unclean. He's aware that Jesus would be, in a sense, compromising himself by coming under his roof.

[18 : 28] So he says, look, don't worry about it. I'm not worthy. I'm not worthy to have you here. I'm not worthy to have you under my roof. The religious leaders have just said, I see this man is worthy.

This man is worth it. And the man himself says, look, no, no, I'm not. The man has an accurate picture of himself. I'm not worthy.

Verse seven, that's why I didn't come to you. I'm not worthy. That's why I've sent my friends to you. That's why I've sent these people who are worthy to you. To tell you not to come. I've sent my friends who, in my estimation, are worthy.

But notice the faith that the man shows. Because what does he say at the end of verse seven? He says to Jesus, look, don't come. I'm not worthy to have you come. Verse seven.

But, verse seven, say the word and let my servant be healed. Don't bother coming. Don't bother journeying to my house. But just say the word and my servant will be healed.

[19 : 32] He sees who Jesus is. He knows who Jesus is. He gets who Jesus is. He doesn't have to be there. He sees that Jesus doesn't have to be there physically.

He sees that Jesus can heal him just by speaking a word, if you like. In recent years, there's been a big sort of push, if you like, towards remote doctoring.

You know, a doctor might come around in a sort of robot with a tablet connected to the internet. The doctor would never see you face to face. The doctor would never examine you by laying his hands on you.

But he could still heal you. He could still give you the right exercises. He could still give you the right medicine to heal you. And here the centurion says to Jesus, look, don't come.

I'm a man under authority. I'm a man in charge of people. I have servants under me. I have soldiers under me. I say to them, come, and they come. I say to them, go, and they go.

[20 : 28] I say to them, jump, and they ask, well, how high? And what's the implication? What is it that the man's saying? Well, in fact, he's saying to Jesus, look, I know you have the same power over sickness.

I know that you simply speak, and the sickness will go. I've heard about the things that you've done. I've heard about the miracles that you've worked. I've heard about the great deeds that you've performed. I've heard about the demons that you've driven out.

All simply by speaking a word. I know that sickness is under your authority, just as these soldiers are under mine. So sickness is under yours.

Therefore, you don't need to come. Therefore, you don't need to be here to physically touch my servant. Rather, simply say the word, and it will happen. Because all of this is under your authority. All of this is under your command. Just as the soldiers are under my command, so sickness is under yours. Jesus heard the words that the friends spoke.

[21 : 29] He turns to the crowd who are with him, and says, look, not even amongst Israel have I found such faith. Not even amongst those who were expecting the Messiah. Not even amongst those who were waiting for God's chosen king.

Not even amongst those who knew God. Have I found such faith? And when they get to the house, they find what? That the servant had been completely healed. That the servant was completely well.

Now, what does this mean for us this morning? Well, we need to see Jesus for who he really is. We need to have that living, active faith in Jesus as the son of God, as the savior of mankind from sin, that we see the centurion has here.

The centurion is full of faith. The centurion is full of hope for what Jesus can do. He is full of faith that Jesus can, and will save his servant. Do we have the same hope?

Do we have the same faith that Jesus can, and will save our friends and family members? Do we have the same hope, and faith, that Jesus can, and will save those in our community who are outside of him?

[22 : 35] Now, the theology of that, as good Calvinist, the theology of that sounds horrendous, doesn't it? That Jesus can, and will save. But sometimes, we can use our theology as a shield.

Sometimes, we can use our theology as a comfort blanket, which says, well, we don't need to reach out into our community. That God will save those he will save anyway. This man had faith that

Jesus could, and would save his servant.

That he could, and would, heal his servant. And so too, friends, we must have faith in what Jesus will do. But until the day that Christ returns, God is in the business of saving people.

God is in the business of drawing people from death to life. God is in the business of drawing people from darkness into light. And we need to have faith and confidence confidence in what Jesus can do, and who Jesus is.

Thirdly, finally, this morning, briefly, we want to think about a dead man. A dead man, and we see that in verse 11. We see Jesus again, traveling. Again with the crowd. And notice that at this time, as Jesus and his disciples travel, they come to this place called Nain.

[23 : 53] And as they come, they're met by this funeral procession. They're met by this cortege, if you like. This man who was the only son of his mother. This man who was the only means of providing for his mother.

This man who was his mother's comfort and security. And the Lord sees her, verse 13. We aren't told anything about her.

We aren't told about her state of faith, only that she's in great distress. We aren't told anything that she says. We aren't told anything about her faith or lack of it.

All we're told simply is that the Lord had compassion on her. What a wonderful thought this morning, that the Lord had compassion on her.

Compassion on the impossible position she now found herself in. Compassion on her because she was living in the sinful, fallen, cursed world. Compassion on her, not only because she'd lost her son, but because she'd also lost her husband.

[24 : 53] And so he goes to this procession. He goes to this buyer and touches him. He says to the young man, I say to you, arise. And gives him back to his mother.

Jesus deals with sin and death. Jesus brings him from death to life. Jesus brings hope where there was no hope.

And what a wonderful thought to think about this morning. The compassionate saviour, our saviour who was so moved by our plight, our saviour who was so moved by our entrapment and sin, came and laid down his life.

Why? So that we might be free. Came and laid down his life. Why? So that we might be brought from death to life. We started out this morning with the question, well, are you worth it as L'Oreal says you are?

In a sense, no. Because none of us are worth it. None of us are worthy this morning. None of us do good deeds. None of us seek after God. None of us long for God.

[25 : 59] All of us have turned aside. All of us have rejected God. All of us this morning are unworthy. But this morning, if we ask ourselves the question, are we worth it, then in another sense, we can answer yes, can't we?

Because the sinless Son of God came and laid down his life so that we might be free. The sinless Son of God came and laid down his life so that we might be brought from death to life forever. Are you worth it? In Jesus Christ, you are. Amen.