

The scope of salvation

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Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[0 : 00] Our first reading comes from the book of Luke, chapter 7, which you'll find on page 1040. So, Luke, chapter 7, starting at verse 1.

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in 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. 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 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 set under authority, with soldiers under me.

[1 : 17] 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, 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. Soon afterwards, 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, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her.

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, Do not weep. Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bier 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 arisen among us, and God has visited his people.

[2 : 36] And this report about him spread throughout the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country. So the second reading is taken from 1 Thessalonians, chapter 4, verses 13 to 18.

It's on page 1189 of the Bibles. It's page 1189. 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 13 to 18. But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep.

You may not grieve as others do, who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

[3 : 50] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them, in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore, encourage one another with these words.

Well, let me add to Andy's Happy New Year. Lovely to see you again. Please do turn to that reading from Luke chapter 7, as we begin a new series of talks for the new year.

So Luke chapter 7, on page 1040. And then let me pray for us, as we hear God's word together.

Let's pray. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. Heavenly Father, we long that Psalm 1 would be true for each one of us, that our delight would indeed be in

your law.

[4 : 59] So please, would you be at work in us by your spirit this morning? Please teach us, rebuke us, correct us, and train us. Please help us to meditate on your law and transform us by it.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I've given this series of talks in Luke's Gospel, the title, Take a Closer Look, because of course there's no more important thing to do, no greater thing to do, no better thing to do at the start of a new year, than to take a closer look at Jesus Christ. Whether we're looking in on the Christian faith, or whether we have been disciples of Jesus for many years, or whether we are somewhere in the middle, my prayer is that this series will help us to set our compass, so to speak, at the start of a new year.

Luke 7 verse 1 marks the start of a new section of Luke's Gospel, which runs right up to the end of chapter 8. The focus of the section is on the salvation that Jesus Christ brings.

By the end of chapter 8, we'll have seen that Jesus brings salvation from dying, salvation from death, salvation from a guilty conscience, salvation from the terrifying power of nature, salvation from demons and the forces of evil, salvation from incurable disease.

[6 : 22] Indeed, Jesus brings a whole new creation. In other words, Luke wants us to have a big view of salvation.

So, here is the equation I want us to have in mind over the next six weeks or so. I'm sorry for those who dislike equations, but there you go. I've put it on the outline.

I've called it New Year maths. And the point, really, is that if you have a small view of Jesus, and a small view of the salvation that Jesus brings, you'll end up with a small view of discipleship, a small, puny kind of Christian.

But if, by contrast, you have a big view of Jesus, and a big view of the salvation Jesus brings, you'll end up with a big view of discipleship, and a big view of what it means to follow Jesus.

Back in October, a Pakistani Christian in Derby was beaten up by Muslims for displaying a cross in his car. He was hospitalized because of his injuries.

[7 : 30] He and his wife had been shunned by the Pakistani community for many years because they are followers of Jesus. Afterwards, he said, I've fled from Pakistan to escape violence such as this.

But even then, nothing will stop me going to church. Well, you only do that, don't you, if you have a big view of Jesus. If you have a big view of the salvation that he brings.

If you have a small view of Jesus, then I take it will just fit in with everyone else, at school, at university, at work, with friends, at home. It's only when we have a big view of Jesus, and a big view of salvation, that we'll love him and serve him, an extravagant, devoted, costly, overflowing delight in Jesus.

The kind of discipleship which Luke wants us to have. Costly, overflowing, extravagant, delighting in Jesus. Well, you'll see on the outline there are two headings.

First of all, salvation for a broken world. Salvation for a broken world. Now, Luke records two miracles here in Luke chapter 7.

[8 : 52] The first, the healing of a centurion's servant. Salvation from dying. Verse 1. After he had finished all his sayings in 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. This is more than illness. Notice, Dr. Luke's medical notes tell us the servant is at the point of death.

This is terminal. This is life hanging by a thread. Any hope of recovery has long gone. And yet, by the end of Jesus' encounter with the centurion, verse 10, when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

But if verses 1 to 10 show us life hanging by a thread, in verses 11 to 17, it has been snuffed out altogether.

Here is salvation not just from dying, but from death itself. Verse 11. Soon afterwards, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him.

[10 : 04] 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, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her.

Dr. Luke knows a dead person when he sees one. He knows the dead cannot be raised to life. So I wonder what you make of verse 13.

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her, do not weep. For Jesus to say to a grieving mother, do not weep, is that really the mark of compassion?

I've taken many funerals. The moment the coffin appears, it's so often the point of the most intense grief. If at that moment I was to turn to the mourners, and say, right everyone, stop crying, would that be a mark of compassion?

Surely that would be callous, in the extreme. But then of course Jesus goes on to say, what if anyone else said at a funeral, would be regarded as the act of a madman?

[11:16] Verse 14, then he came up and touched the beer, and the bearers 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.

It's no wonder, is it, that twice in this section, Luke calls Jesus Lord. Lord. In verse 6, it's the centurion who addresses Jesus as Lord.

In verse 13, and when the Lord saw her, the first time Luke himself, writing his gospel, calls Jesus Lord. As Jesus demonstrates, he is indeed Lord.

Lord over the causes of death, sickness, illness, disease. Lord over death itself. Now, it speaks so directly to us, of course, because we live in a culture that shies away from death, that hides from death, that won't even begin to think about death.

That came home to me just before Christmas with the latest series of the Grand Tour, the successor to Top Gear, was released. Jeremy Clarkson, James May, and Richard Hammond are back with their banter and their outrageously expensive cars.

[12:35] Not, of course, that it is about cars anymore. It is pure entertainment. A never-ending middle-aged road trip as it has been described. So the jokes are the same.

The outcomes are predictable. Stunning locations. Top ratings. So, what is the appeal? Well, Hugo Rifkin, writing in the Times, commenting on the endless banter of those three characters, wrote this. They talk like this because life and existence is a gaping void of nothingness and we are all cold and lonely and going to die.

All-male conversation, cars, football, politics, woodwork, the merits of the M6 motorway toll, how you work a tank is basically the same conversation.

It is white noise. It blocks out the fear. Is that not very striking? I guess half of the room might have worked out already that all-male conversation is basically the same, but the other half of which I am part of had not.

[13:49] It is why the birth of Jesus is such brilliant news because Jesus did not remain a baby in a manger.

And yet, of course, the sadness is that while so many have simply moved onto the sales or gone back to work and won't give Jesus Christ any serious thought at all until next Christmas, actually, Jesus alone is the one who can take away fear of death.

He died on a cross so we can be forgiven, right with God, and welcomed by Him after death. He rose from the dead three days later, never to die again.

It's why in Luke's second volume in the book of Acts, he is proclaimed throughout the Roman Empire as Lord. Now, of course, that alone is sufficient, I think, to give us a big view of Jesus.

After all, who else has triumphed over death like he has? But actually, Luke wants us to have, I think, an even bigger view still and here is the spoiler alert for next week's passage because notice, really, the very next thing that happens in verses 18 and 19.

[15:08] The disciples of John, John the Baptist, that is, reported all these things to him and John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord saying, are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?

So they go to Jesus, they ask their question and notice that in verse 22, Jesus doesn't simply reply by saying, yes, I am the one.

Instead, verse 22, he says, go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them and blessed is the one who is not offended by me.

In other words, you see, these two miracles we're looking at in Luke chapter 7 this morning, saving from dying, saving from death, we're not to see them as two miracles on their own but as part of an even bigger picture, an even bigger canvas.

Rather like when you do a jigsaw, some of us in the family did a jigsaw over New Year and you get to the point where there's a kind of boat over here, there's a few people having a conversation over here, there's a cottage up there, there's a red postal van there and then suddenly you get that fantastic moment when you realise actually they all fit together and rather than just being sort of four isolated little bits of the jigsaw, they all come together and make up this wonderful picture.

[16:38] where in the same way you see put together the miracles of Jesus and you have something far, far bigger, a foretaste of the new creation, a remade world, a world with no death, no disease, no sickness, with the effects of human sin gone.

One of the things people sometimes say is that Christianity is simply for weak people who cannot cope with life, a psychological crutch.

No, Christians are realists. We know that the world of social media where everyone is having a wonderful time all the time is a fake world.

Because although we may think we're in control of our lives, we may think that we can take care of everything that life throws at us ourselves, it only takes someone to die.

A colleague, a friend, a family member, and immediately we are confronted, aren't we, with the limitations of our power, the limitations of what we can do.

[17:53] I think it's why a time like that actually, although very painful, can be so very healthy and so very helpful. As we find ourselves asking the question, is there anyone who can raise the dead?

Is there life beyond the grave? And the resounding answer is yes. Jesus Christ has defeated death. In him we can face death with confidence. Salvation for a broken world. Well, secondly, salvation, well, the outline says by faith, which is my thought, I think, for not sending the revised outline through early enough, but if you've got a pen, scrub it out and write down salvation for broken people.

So salvation for a broken world, salvation, secondly, for broken people. Have a look at verse 9.

When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him and turning to the crowd that followed him said, I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.

It's the only time that Luke tells us that Jesus marveled at anyone. It is really a great highlight as Jesus assessed the crowd, look, here is someone who's got it. Here is someone with genuine faith.

[19:21] He shows us what genuine faith looks like. Indeed, faith and a right response to Jesus is one of the things we'll see consistently over these next six weeks through Luke 7 and 8.

So what does genuine faith, genuine belief look like? Well, two things. First of all, genuine faith has nothing to give. Now, I love the way Luke makes this point, verse 3.

When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews asking him to come and heal his servants. He's clearly a decent God-fearing man, isn't he?

And as a decent God-fearing man, yet he clearly senses this gulf between himself and Jesus, which is why he sends this delegation of elders.

In verse 4, they take their role seriously. They lobby him. 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 built us our synagogue.

[20:34] And yet, of course, we know that Jesus doesn't work on the basis of if I scratch your back, will you scratch mine? Remember chapter 6, verse 32, where Jesus says, if you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you?

For even sinners love those who love them. And verse 36, be merciful even as your father is merciful. And so you see, the Lord Jesus goes with this delegation, not because he's been lobbied, but because he is merciful.

Indeed, the centurion himself recognizes that he has nothing to give, verse 6, 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.

He's a Gentile, he's a non-Jew, Jesus would be richly unclean entering his home. Here is a man with nothing to give.

He knows that, nothing to bargain with. What is faith? It is not faith that we have done the best we could before God.

[21:53] It is not the faith that hopes that perhaps God will assess our merits and achievements generously. Rather, faith abandons any thought of deserving salvation.

It has nothing to give. Besides, if Jesus did work on the basis of merit, who of us in this room would put our hand up and say, yep, I think I qualify on the basis of merit?

You see, for all their religion, these Jewish elders have got it completely wrong. They are, in fact, very secular in their thinking. God, if you get me through this illness, if you get me through this crisis, if you get me through these exams, if you get me through this next phase in my career, then I'll do such and such for you.

God, I've had a quiet time every day this year, seven days. I go to church regularly. I am worthy. You owe me one.

You see, that kind of view of God, it's a very small view of God. It's a God I can manipulate. Which is why this centurion, he's just so wonderfully refreshing, isn't he?

[23 : 07] Because he's so honest about himself. He's abandoned all ideas that he deserves to be helped by Jesus. Just like the woman in verses 11 to 17.

She's already lost her husband. She's now lost her son as well. In a society without a welfare state, she is helpless, exposed to poverty and ill treatment.

And yet, once again, with great compassion, verse 13, the Lord Jesus steps in. Once again, verse 14, he is willing to defile himself by touching the coffin.

I take it the point is that whether you're like the centurion and you have good works to your credit and you have resources and you are well regarded by others, or whether you're like the woman and you have none of those things, it makes no difference.

Because faith doesn't trust, genuine Christian faith doesn't trust in our works. Neither those we've done in the past, nor the ones we're doing at the moment, nor the ones that we'll do in the future.

[24 : 17] Jesus is not impressed by them. Which means, of course, and very wonderfully, that no one is excluded. And therefore, you see, we mustn't make the mistake, and please don't make this mistake, of thinking that Christianity is for respectable, sorted people.

Jesus doesn't look at a crowd of people like us this morning and ask who is worthy. No, he asks who is needy.

Salvation not just for a broken world, but salvation for those who recognize they are broken people. It is wonderfully liberating, isn't it?

Jesus came for the spiritually sick. He died on the cross for sinners. So don't make the mistake either of looking at a church like Grace Church and thinking that everyone looks sorted and therefore I don't belong here.

Because although the circumstances of this centurion and the woman, they're very different, aren't they? A woman, a man, a Jew, a Gentile, one well off, the other poor, one powerful, the other powerless.

[25 : 42] Very different. And yet wonderfully, the Lord Jesus regards them in exactly the same way. Genuine faith has nothing to give.

But secondly, genuine faith in Jesus' word. The centurion had command of a hundred soldiers, the equivalent of a major, I guess, in the British army today. One imagines he was tough, level-headed, used to dealing in facts, making rational decisions, a leader, a man's man.

A far cry, perhaps, from the kind of person who you might imagine would have faith in Jesus. But that, of course, is only because our culture has reduced faith to something that is vague and rather airy-fairy.

But faith isn't a blind leap in the dark. Rather, it comes as we engage our minds, as we have confidence in the words of Jesus.

Notice that confidence in verses 7 and 8. Therefore, I did not presume to come to you, but say the word, and let my servant be healed.

[26 : 54] For I, too, a man sat 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.

You see, the centurion recognizes the principle of delegated authority, his power delegated from the emperor. When he speaks, it is as if the emperor himself is speaking.

And in Jesus, therefore, he recognizes the authority of God himself, over sickness, over death, an authority that even extends over time and space, because Jesus is not with the servant at the time. Just as noted in verse 14, it's by speaking, it's with the power of his word that Jesus raises the woman's son. Verse 14, young man, I say to you, arise.

Now, the name Jeremy Marshall will be familiar to some of us. He's in his mid-50s. He's a husband and a father. He used to work at Credit Suisse in Canary Wharf. He then became CEO of Hawes Bank in the city.

[28 : 07] In 2015, he was diagnosed with cancer. He assumed that with the right treatment, all would be well. A year ago, he was told it was terminal.

In October, with just a few months to live, he gave a talk on this very passage in Luke chapter 7. He spoke wonderfully, clearly, level-headedly of his confidence in the words of Jesus to raise the dead. Well, it's no wonder is it that the crowds respond as they do. Fear of God. Fear sees them all. And they glorified God, saying, a great prophet has risen among us.

God has visited his people. Fear or it's how people respond in the presence of God. And so it begs the question of next week's passage, which is who is this?

a prophet or God himself? Although actually we have the answer already. Turn back will you to Luke chapter 4, page 1036.

[29 : 31] Because I wonder if these two miracles we've been looking at today ring any bells. They should do. Here we are at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He's proclaimed his manifesto.

And do you remember how he then spoke about two events back in the Old Testament? So verses 24 to 26, how when Elijah was a prophet, he was sent by God to a widow whose son was dead. And Elijah called out to God, O Lord my God, let this child's life come back into him again. And he was raised, his life restored.

And then in verse 27, Jesus speaks of the time when Elisha was a prophet and was sent by God to Naaman, a general in the Syrian army, a Gentile, not a Jew, to heal him of his illness.

And having been healed, he declares, behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel. A Gentile soldier, a helpless widow, just like in Luke chapter 7.

[30 : 40] But notice really, who did the miracles? In the Old Testament, it was God. In Luke 7, it's Jesus.

It's the same. And he does it by speaking. Jesus is more than a prophet. He is God on earth. It's why, by the way, I thought it would be so helpful to have that other reading from 1 Thessalonians, because at the end of history, it is with a word that Jesus raises the dead.

Let me read 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 16 again. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will raise.

Is that not wonderful? A glorious day to look forward to? Remember, Luke writes to give us confidence, certainty in Jesus. Jesus really is the only credible solution in the face of death.

It is a glorious message. We can believe it with confidence, and we can and should proclaim it with confidence.

[31 : 58] Let's spend a few moments in quiet, and then I shall lead us in prayer. And the dead man sat up and began to speak.

Heavenly Father, we praise you that Jesus Christ is indeed Lord, Lord over illness and sickness, Lord over death. We thank you that he himself rose from the dead, never to die again.

Thank you that he is Lord today. Thank you that he will return as Lord on the final day. that all the dead will be raised.

We thank you for the great confidence and certainty we can have in Jesus. We pray that you grant us this confidence for ourselves and confidence to proclaim it to others. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[33 : 02] Amen. Amen.