

God has come to help His People

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[0:00] In honour of Chinese New Year, Happy New Year, Chinese New Year. Is it Year of the Tiger? That's good, right? Right.

Because, you know, there are good animals and bad animals. In honour of Chinese New Year, I learnt a Chinese word that I'd like to share with you. But I do this nervously, obviously, because my pronunciation is terrible and that's really important with Mandarin.

But also because after the 745 service, someone told me that this actually isn't Chinese. So that made me really nervous and I didn't know where to go with that. But they told me that this was more a South Asian sort of dialect.

So I think they said this is more Malaysian, Singaporean style Chinese. But if I say it's Chinese, can you please forgive me and just, can we just move through this? It's South Asian, but that doesn't tie as well with Chinese.

Anyway, here's the word. Wa Sai. Wa Sai. It is how some people in China say the word wow.

[1:04] Wa Sai. Wow. And wow, that is a good summary of where we are in Luke's Gospel. We're picking up the story from Chapter 7. But there are lots of wa Sai, wow moments in the first six chapters as well.

There's the Christmas story with a virgin birth, shepherds, angels, wise men. When Jesus was just 12 years old, he was schooling grown adults in the temple.

He heals sicknesses, casts out demons. He reads Isaiah's prophecy about God's Savior and says, today this scripture is fulfilled.

And of course, there is Jesus' compassion. He touches a leper. He eats with sinners and tax collectors. And these are just some of the stories we might tell our family and friends about Jesus. Jesus, the healer. Jesus, the teacher. Jesus, the compassionate. Wa Sai or wow. That is the right response. But then we get to Chapter 7 today.

[2:11] And it's much harder to get a wow today. Not because the story isn't amazing, but because today the claim is death to life.

Verse 2, there's a centurion servant who was sick and about to die. In verse 12, there's a dead person being carried out. Really?

Jesus reverses death? Are you sure? The other Chinese word I learned is this. Haiya or haiya. And that is, that also means wow.

But that is like a wow when you're really disappointed. Like, you really believe Jesus reverses death? Haiya, you poor, gullible Christian.

Wow, how foolish. But Luke today wants to give us certainty. Right from the outset of his gospel, certainty is his goal. He says, I too decided to write an orderly account.

[3:14] He says, which you can see on the screen there in, oh no, backwards. Yeah, that in the black there. It says, that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Yes, certainty about Jesus' teaching, certainty about kindness and compassion, but certainty that he really can save us from the problem of death.

See, the whole Bible is bookended by the problem of death. In Genesis, sin comes in and spoils things because sin leads to death. Death is the climax of God's judgment.

The whole Bible is a search for a saviour. And that's what Luke wants us to be certain about when we see Jesus. He keeps repeating it over and over in the opening chapters, just so we're sure.

Andre, can I please have this slide? Here are the opening chapters of Luke. You can see the repeated item about Jesus. He's raised up a horn of salvation to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins.

[4 : 20] Today, a saviour has been born. My eyes have seen your salvation. All people will see God's salvation. Thanks, Andre. You see, Jesus forgives sins.

That is the heart of the gospel. But as he deals with that root problem, he also paves the way for all the other consequences of sin to be rolled back, namely death.

And so will it be, wow, that's amazing, or wow, you poor, gullible Christians? Let's have a look. We're at point one. Verse one.

When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. There, a centurion servant whom his master valued highly was sick and about to die.

It says that the centurion servant was highly valued, which means he was much loved in his master's house. We're also told that he was sick and about to die.

[5 : 21] And that is like when the doctors say, I'm sorry, there's nothing more we can do for him. And I realize that in a room like this, lots of people will have heard doctors say that to them about their loved ones.

Today's passage is not just a theological issue, is it? It's deeply personal. There's the desperation of the sufferer, the desperation of the family trying to ease the pain, trying to swap places with their loved one if they could.

But here is a centurion who's heard about Jesus. Just so you know, centurions, they're Roman army captains. So you should be picturing like Russell Crowe in the Gladiator movie.

That's sort of the right ballpark. This centurion, he will have heard rumors from all the towns, constantly dispatching troops for crowd control.

And every time the same name keeps coming up to him, Jesus, Jesus. So in verse three, the centurion heard of Jesus. So he sent some elders of the Jews to ask to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.

[6 : 37] You see, obviously he's not friends with Jesus. He's a Gentile soldier. So he sent some Jews to see if they can persuade their savior to take pity on him for his servant.

Verse four, when they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him. This man deserves to have you do this. He loves our nation and has built our synagogue. And so Jesus went with them.

But before he gets there, the centurion sends a message to Jesus. Look, don't bother, Jesus. Don't bother coming. Verse seven, just 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 that one come, and he comes. I say to my servant, do this, and he does it. And so Jesus gives the order.

Verse 10, then the men who'd been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. Did you notice that it was a healing from death at a distance with just a word?

[7 : 41] It's pretty incredible stuff, isn't it? But the second miracle, I think, is even more amazing. This time, Jesus turns up to a funeral.

Verse 11, we're told the funeral was in the town of Nain. There were many witnesses, disciples, and large crowds followed all the commotion. In verse 12, as he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out, the only son of his mother.

And she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. The scene here is like a state funeral. You know where lots of people line the streets as the coffin goes past? But this scene is even more tragic because the deceased is the only son of a mother.

And she was a widow. You see, we expect to be at our parents' funeral. But to be at your child's, I reckon that's about as bad as life gets.

Back then as well, this woman, she's a widow. But now losing her son, she's also lost any means she has of being provided for.

[8 : 49] She's alone in the world. And I think that's what makes verse 13 so special. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her.

God's heart went out to her. He said, don't cry. Verse 14, then he went up and touched the buyer. They were carrying him on and the bearers stood still.

He said, young man, I say to you, get up. And I have been to tons of funerals and I've presided over quite a lot myself now. But I've never heard anyone ever tell a grieving mother, don't cry.

Much less telling the dead body to get up. But we've seen what he has done for the centurion servant.

And so verse 14, the dead, sorry, verse 15, the dead man sat up and began to talk. Wow. He began to talk.

[9 : 50] What must he have said? Oh, thanks very much for showing up to my funeral. I'm really touched. Can someone please give me something to eat? I'm starving. And as incredible as all that is, I think the really incredible thing is verse 15.

Where Jesus gave him back to his mother. My mum has three sons. So I know a bit about mums and sons. I can't imagine the roller coaster of that poor woman that day.

The roller coaster of emotions. But I bet she never let that son out of her sight for months and months and months. Not only is her son back from the dead, but now she is restored in almost every sense of the word.

You know, at funerals we say to grieving people, we say, oh, is there anything I can do for you? Can I make you some dinner? Can I come around for a cup of tea? Can I give you a hug?

When Jesus turns up to a funeral, is there anything I can do? How about I give your son back to you? Would that be a help? It's two people as good as dead.

[10 : 57] Two loved ones at their wits end. Two situations where all human efforts are exhausted. But two displays of the power of Jesus' word.

Just say the word and my servant will be healed. I say to you, get up. And he got up and began to talk.

Who is this Jesus? Well, Isaiah, our Old Testament reading, he tells us who. From our first reading, it says, You see, no one has ever dared tell a grieving mother, stop crying.

But when the sovereign Lord turns up to a funeral, he will wipe away the tears from all the faces. And why? Because he's there to swallow up all the death.

That is the promise of Isaiah. And our story from Luke is the confirmation that it has begun. It's already begun.

[12 : 15] You see, because Jesus forgives sins, it means all the other consequences of sin are sent packing as well. Namely, and chiefly, death.

And so with Jesus, it's no more funerals, no more bereavements, no more sympathy cards, no more floral wreaths, no more coffins, no more ministers, no more doctors, no more chemists, no more oncology wards, no more Alzheimer's, no more dementia, no more stroke, no more heart attack, and of course, no more COVID.

Revelation 21, it's the end of the Bible, and it picks up Isaiah's promise. Listen to this. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain. These are the old order of things, and they have passed away. You see, in Jesus' kingdom, it won't be you who dies, it will be death that passes away.

Can you imagine being at the funeral of death? Wouldn't that be a party? Oh, see you later, death. We won't miss you. See, people in Melbourne, they always say the same thing.

[13 : 26] Oh, death, it's just a natural part of life. But it isn't. It isn't. The Bible says death is a shroud, or a shadow that gets in the way of real life.

Until today, when the sovereign Lord decided to turn up to a funeral, and with just six words, I say to you, get up.

He got up and began to talk. Even our most serious enemy is sent packing with just a word. Who is this Jesus?

Death removing, curse reversing, world restoring Jesus. That is what he means by salvation.

Not just a forgiveness of sins. Even the consequences of sin, the death and the tears and the mourning are sent packing. And wow is the right response.

[14 : 29] Wow, that's amazing. That is the response of the people. Verse 16. They were filled with awe and praised God. And wow, that is quite a common response, isn't it, in the Gospels?

It's always a wow moment. Everywhere Jesus goes. But what's not so common in the story is to hear Jesus say wow. But that's exactly what he does.

This is our second point. Did you remember when the centurion sent the Jewish elders to persuade Jesus? They said, verse 4, oh, this man deserves to have you do this because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.

It's almost as if they thought God owes the centurion a miracle because of all his good deeds. But the centurion's own opinion of himself was radically different.

Verse 6. Lord, don't trouble yourself. I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I didn't even consider myself worthy to come to you.

[15:32] See, unlike the Jewish elders, this Gentile soldier is not trusting in anything in himself. He knows he has nothing to offer God. His only hope rests in what Jesus is able to do.

Verse 7. Just 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 to go and he goes and that one come and he comes.

I say to my servant, do this and he does it. In other words, Jesus, you and I are a lot alike. But you are on a totally different level.

I can tell people to come and go, but you can send terminal illnesses packing. So just say the word and my servant will be healed.

Verse 9. When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. He said, wow. And turning to the crowd, following him, he said, I tell you, I have not found such great faith, even in Israel.

[16:34] What makes Jesus say, wow? It's a simple trust in him. He's not Jewish, this soldier. He's trusting in Jesus. All his hope is that Jesus is the one who can sort out his biggest problem.

And that makes Jesus say, wow. And as we begin to apply this, what were you planning to do about the problem of death?

What is your strategy? One of one of us will die. That is pretty scary odds, isn't it? A hundred percent. One of one. I hope I don't die painfully or before my time.

I hope I don't die before my kids or suddenly. But I will die. And so will you. I hope you don't. But I know you will.

And I realize it's obvious to be scared of death. It's not a nice topic to talk about. But what are you planning to do about it?

[17:42] Some religions, they want you to see death as a positive. So they invent this thing called reincarnation. You know, like a sort of circle of life, like a mouse on a wheel constantly going round. You can view death as a great motivator.

So people say things like, oh, live each day as if you're last. The trouble is if you do that, one day you will be right. You can turn death into a joke like Woody Allen. I'm not afraid of death.

I just don't want to be there when it happens. Maybe you can do what the rest of Melbourne does, which is pure avoidance and hope it goes away. Maybe if you're young enough, you can treat death like an old people problem.

These are the best approaches our world has to offer. But Luke thinks we can do better. He wants you to stare death in the face and see that it is reversible.

His evidence is a centurion servant and a widow's son. I say to you, get up. That's what Jesus will say to your corpse if you put your trust in him.

[18:45] I say to you, get up. It's an incredible idea, isn't it? But Luke wants you to be certain. You see, anyone can invent a religion about a compassionate man and some good teaching.

But Luke wants you to be certain. You see, you wouldn't invent a religion that includes death to life because you'll end up looking foolish. Wow, you poor, gullible Christians.

You wouldn't do that. You couldn't make claims that include actual place names like Nain and Capernaum that keep mentioning crowds and crowds of eyewitnesses.

All skeptics needed to do was go to Capernaum and ask for the only centurion or go to Nain and ask for the widow and the son and see if it was all true.

You couldn't invent a religion like that. You wouldn't. Unless, of course, that is just what happened. You see, Luke is documenting eyewitness testimony.

[19:49] He keeps recording what people did and said and saw. It's evidence he's presenting. In verse 16, it says, A great prophet has appeared among us.

God has come to help his people. And Luke presents this as the only logical explanation for the events in these two stories.

It's easy to scoff, isn't it, as though they were ignorant peasants and we are medically superior. But I bet that they knew death better than we did. And we spent all our time avoiding death, unlike the people back then.

They saw what had happened. They put two and two together. And their conclusion was praise to God. Why? Because they realized that God had showed up to a funeral to help them.

Verse 17 says, This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country. And if you were in the crowds that day, how long would it be until you stopped talking about what you

saw?

[20 : 58] If it was me, I wouldn't shut up about it for years and years, what Jesus did at the funeral. The more certain we are about death to life, the more we will be like the crowds in Luke's gospel.

You see, evangelism, that is telling people about Jesus, it's as much about our belief as it is about the belief of the person you're trying to convert.

But I wonder if this is one miracle that we're less likely to share with people. Not because it isn't amazing, but because of the reaction.

Bringing dead people to life? Are you sure? You poor, gullible Christian. You see, it's easier to talk about a Jesus who's kind and compassionate, who's a good teacher, you know, gentle Jesus, meek and mild.

A Jesus like that will always win a hearing in this town. But the real Jesus raises people from death to life.

[22 : 03] And why should we keep quiet about that? One of one person that you will meet today will need Jesus to sort out their biggest problem of death.

Without us, all they've got are the stupid suggestions of Melbourne. Treat it like a joke. Avoid it. Hope it goes away. Wait till you're old enough to deal with it. In this story, the centurion's faith was solely built on what he had heard.

Verse 3 says the centurion heard of Jesus. He was told about a man who could speak. And wow, things followed. Which is why he said, Just say the word and my servant will be healed.

See, the people out there, they need to realise that death is reversible. That if they put their trust in Jesus, he will say to their corpses, I say to you, get up.

And it will certainly happen. But more than that, you need to realise that. I need to realise that. That way, we will be wowed enough to open our mouths and speak.

[23 : 16] Better than that, if you can't speak to anyone, put them in front of a Bible. You see, those Bibles in your hands, in your homes, those Bibles, they really aren't safe.

They're full of Jesus' words. They really have the power to bring people from death to life if people believe them. And maybe, you know, others will say to us, Oh, you poor, gullible Christians.

Yeah, maybe they'll say that. But maybe they will say, Wow, that's amazing. Tell me more. And so, can you ask God to move this truth down deeper into your hearts until the point where you are wowed enough to open your mouth and speak?

And pray that our loved ones would hear it and believe it for themselves. In fact, what we're going to do now is something a bit different. We're going to actually do that right now rather than just talk about it.

So, just for a minute and a half or so, I'd like you to turn to the person next to you, your friend, or if you feel comfortable, just sit by yourself. I would like you to pray two quick prayers.

[24 : 28] Pray for yourself that you would really believe that Jesus can move people from death to life. Pray that it would go down deeper in the flaws of your heart.

So, pray for yourself to believe and then pray for your loved ones. Name them. Maybe tell the person next to you who you're praying for. Name them and ask Jesus to bring them from death to life.

That is, as you speak to them. Two prayers for yourself and for your loved ones to be moved from death to life. Over to you for about a minute and a half and I will interrupt you. Two, please pray by yourself if you feel more comfortable.

Over to you. Let's join together. Let me lead us in prayer. Father God, we praise you that Jesus came to sort out our biggest problem of sin and death.

And Father, we pray that we would be convicted of these things. Please move these truths deeper down the flaws of our heart. Please, would you wow us so that we can't stop talking about it.

[25 : 37] Thank you that we can do so much better than avoiding death and turning it into a joke. Thank you that death is reversible in Jesus. Father God, we pray for our loved ones.

Pray for our husbands, our wives, our kids, our grandkids, our brothers and sisters. People we love who don't know Jesus.

Please name them in your hearts. Father God, we carry the burden for them all the time. Please, Father, make us speak to them about the real Jesus.

If not us, put other Christians in their paths who are bold to speak. Father, please put them in front of your Bible full of Jesus' words.

We pray, Father, that they would hear and respond like the centurion with a simple faith. Please, Father, bring our loved ones from death to life in Jesus.
[26 : 43] We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.