

God has come to help His People

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- [0:00] So in honour of Chinese New Year, Year of the Tiger, right? That sounds good, right? That sounds like an impressive Year of the Tiger. In honour of Chinese New Year, I learnt a Chinese word, which I'm going to share with you.
- But then at the morning services, I was told it's not actually Chinese. So I'm really embarrassed, but I can't go back now. But I was told it was more a Malaysian, Singaporean, South Asian sort of.
- So people from China don't attack me later. I recognise this is not Chinese proper, but some sort of three, so don't get mad.
- All right, here it is. Here's my word. The word is wa-sai. Wa-sai. And wa-sai, forgetting the pronunciation, wa-sai means wow. Wow, it's how Chinese people say wow.
- Wa-sai. 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 wow is a good summary of the first six chapters.
- [1:06] There's the Christmas story of virgin birth, shepherds, angels, wise men. When Jesus was just 12 years old, he was schooling grown adults in the temple.
- He was healing all sorts of diseases, casting out demons. He read the prophet Isaiah, which talks about God's saviour and says, today this scripture is fulfilled.
- And let's not forget his compassion. He actually touched a leper. He ate with sinners and tax collectors. And these are some of the stories that we might tell our family and friends about.
- Jesus the teacher. Jesus the healer. Jesus the compassionate. Wa-sai or wow. That would be the right response. But then we get to today's story.
- And it's much harder to get a wow. Not because the story isn't amazing. But because today the claim is that Jesus saves people from death.
- [2:10] Verse 2. A centurion servant was sick and about to die. In verse 12. There's a dead person being carried out at a funeral.
- Really? Jesus reverses death? Are you sure? The other Chinese word I learnt is this. Hai-ya.
- That's also how Chinese people say wow. But for disappointing situations like this. You really think Jesus reverses death? Hai-ya.
- You poor, gullible Christian. But Luke is here to give us certainty. Right from the outset of his gospel, that's what he's claiming to do. He says, I too decided to write an orderly account.
- He says, which you can see right there, that you may know the certainty of the things that you have been taught. Yes, certainty about Jesus' teaching. Certainty about his kindness and compassion.
- [3:12] But certainty that he really can solve the problem of death. You see, the whole Bible is bookended by the problem of death. Death.

In Genesis, in the garden, sin comes in and spoils everything because sin leads to death. Death is the climax of God's judgment. And so the whole Bible is a search for a saviour.

And that is what Luke wants us to be certain about. In fact, he repeats it again and again in the opening chapters, just so we don't miss it. And so please, a slide on the screen.

These are the opening chapters. He has raised up a horn of salvation to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of sins. A saviour has been born.

My eyes have seen your salvation. All people will see God's salvation. You see, Jesus forgives sins. That is the heart of the gospel. But as he deals with that root problem, he also rolls back all the other consequences of sin.

[4 : 14] Chiefly, death. Death. And so will it be, wow, that's amazing, or wow, you poor, gullible Christians?

Let's see as we go through the story. Verse 1. Thanks for that slide. I don't need it now. Verse 1. Just in case you don't know, a centurion is a Roman army captain.

And so picture Russell Crowe in the Gladiator movie, and you're sort of in the right ballpark. 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. And that is like when the doctors say to you, I'm sorry, there's nothing more we can do. And I realize that lots of people in this room will have heard doctors say something like that.

I'm sorry. There's nothing more we can do. Today's story isn't just a theological issue. It's deeply personal. There's the desperation of the sufferer.

[5 : 36] The desperation of the family trying to ease their pain. Hoping to swap places, if at all possible. But in verse 3, our centurion has heard about Jesus.

And so he will have heard rumors from the towns, constantly dispatching troops for all the crowd control issues. And every time he does it, the same name keeps coming across his desk.

Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. And so in verse 3, he sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. You see, he's a Roman Gentile soldier.

He knows he's not Jesus' best friends. So he asked some of the Jews to see if they could persuade their savior to take pity on his servant instead. Verse 4.

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. So Jesus went with them.

[6 : 41] But before he gets there, the centurion sends him a text message saying, look, Jesus, don't bother with the journey. Rather, verse 7. Just say the word and my servant will be healed.

For I myself am a man under authority. We're sold as 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, just give the order.

My servant will be healed. And so in verse 10, that's what Jesus does. Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found that the servant was well.

Did you notice that he was healed from death at a distance with just a word? It's quite remarkable, isn't it? It's quite a claim.

But I think the second story is even more impressive. Because this time, Jesus turns up at a funeral. In verse 11, we learn the name of the place.

[7:42] It's in a town called Nain. We're told there were many witnesses. Large crowds kept following the disciples, seeing what all the commotion was about. 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, state funerals where lots of people line the streets as the coffin goes past.

But this scene is more emotionally charged. Because the deceased is the only son of a mother. A mother who's also a widow. We expect to be at our parents' funerals, don't we?

But not at the funeral of our kids. I think that is about as bad as life gets. Back then for this mother, not only has she lost her husband, now losing her son, she's lost her only means of being provided for.

She's alone in almost every sense of the word. But I think that's what makes verse 13 so special. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her.

[8:51] He said, don't cry. Then he went up, touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearer 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 few as well.

But I've never heard anyone ever say to a grieving mother, don't cry. Much less saying to a dead body, get up. But we have seen what Jesus did for the centurion servant.

And in verse 15, something amazing happens. The dead man sat up and began to talk. He began to talk. What must he have said?

Oh, thanks everyone for coming out to my funeral. I'm really touched. Sorry you've gone to all the trouble. Could someone please get me some food? I'm starving. Wow.

A dead person got up at his own funeral. And as incredible as that is, I think the best part is verse 15, where Jesus gave him back to his mother.

[9:57] See, I can't imagine the roller coaster of emotions for that mother that day, but I bet she didn't let her son out of her sight for months and months and months.

Not only is son back from the dead, but now mum is also fully restored in her community. You know, at funerals, we say to grieving people, is there anything I can do?

Can I make you a meal? Can I come around for a cup of tea? Can I give you a hug? One day Jesus turned up to a funeral. Is there anything I can do? Can I give your son back to you?

Would that be a help? It is two people as good as dead, two loved ones at their wits end, two situations where all human efforts are exhausted, but two words from Jesus.

Just say the word and my servant will be healed. I say to you, get up. And he rose. Who is this Jesus?

[11:02] Jesus. And Isaiah, the prophet, tells us who. Verse 1 of Isaiah, 6 of Isaiah says, On this mountain, the Lord Almighty, he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all people, the sheet that covers all nations.

He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all the faces. You see, no one would ever dare tell a grieving mother, don't cry.

But when the sovereign Lord turns up to a funeral, Isaiah says he will wipe away the tears from all the faces. And why? Because he is able to swallow up all the death wherever he sees it.

That is the promise of Isaiah. And our story is Luke's confirmation that it has already begun in Jesus. You see, because Jesus forgives sins, it means he deals with the root problem.

And that means all the consequences of sin are rolled back and sent in reverse, namely death. And so with Jesus, it's no more funerals. It's no more coffins.

[12:13] It's no more sympathy cards. It's no more bereavement. It's no more floral wreaths. It's no more ministers. It's no more doctors. No more oncology wards.

No more medicine. No more pharmacists. No more Alzheimer's. No more dementia. No more stroke. No more heart attack. Revelation 21. That's the end of the Bible. And it says the same thing Isaiah does.

The end of the Bible says he will wipe away every tear from every eye. 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, but death that passes away. Can you imagine going to the funeral of death itself? Won't there be a party?

See you later, death. We won't miss you. See, everyone in Melbourne, they think that death is a natural part of life, but it isn't. It isn't. The Bible says that death is a shroud or a shadow that gets in the way of real life.

[13:21] Until today, when the sovereign Lord decided to turn up to a funeral and with just six words, I say to you, get up.

And he got up after being dead at his own funeral. Death reversing, curse removing, world restoring.

That is what Jesus means when he talks about salvation. And wow is the right response. That is the response of the people that day. Verse 16.

They were all filled with awe and praised God. And actually, through the Gospels, as we will keep saying, wow is the right response. It's always a wow moment whenever the death reverser is in town.

But what's not so common is to see Jesus say, wow. But that's exactly what he does in this story. Have a look.

[14:22] This is our second point. Do you remember the centurion servant? Remember when he sent the Jewish elders on his behalf? The Jewish elder said in verse 4, 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 owed the centurion a miracle for his record of good deeds. But the centurion's own pin of himself was very different. Verse 6.

Lord, don't trouble yourself. 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.

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. Say the word and my servant will be healed. 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.

[15:24] I say to this to my servant, do this and he does it. And when Jesus heard this, he said, wow. He was amazed. And he says, turning to the crowd, I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.

In other words, the centurion says, Jesus, I am a bit like you. When I speak, people follow. When I say go, they go. But you, Jesus, are on an entirely different level.

When you speak, even terminal illnesses are sent packing. And Jesus goes, wow. Someone finally gets me. Wow.

You see, it's the simple faith that is not trusting in itself or its record of good deeds, but in what Jesus and his words can do.

He's not Jewish. He's not trusting in his good deeds. He's humble enough to put everything he has, all his hope in Jesus and what he is able to do.

- [16:31] And that makes Jesus say, wow. Not even in Israel have I found a faith like this. It's remarkable. And as we move to apply this, like the centurion, what are you planning to do about the problem of death?

One of one of you will die. I hope I don't die painfully or before my time or while my kids are young. I hope I don't die suddenly.

But I will die. And so will you. I wish you wouldn't, but you will. It's obviously not a nice thing to talk about. It's hard and it's a scary topic to address.

But if you're not a Christian, even if you are a Christian, but what is your plan to deal with death? Here are some of the strategies you can try. Some religions want you to see death as a positive.

And so they invented reincarnation. You know, like the circle of life, like a mouse on a wheel. Just have another go, have another go, have another go. You can view death as a great motivator.

- [17:44] The trouble is, if you live each day as though it's your last, one day you will be correct. You can turn death into a joke. Woody Allen, the comedian, he said, I'm not afraid of death.

I just don't want to be there when it happens. You can do what the rest of Melbourne does, which is avoidance. Not talking about it. Maybe you're young enough that you can treat death like an old person problem.

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

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

It's an incredible idea, but Luke wants you to be certain. You see, anyone can invent a religion based on compassion and a nice leader and a few random events here.

- [18:53] Anyone can invent a religion like that. But you wouldn't invent a religion that includes death to life. You're opening yourself up to look foolish, you poor, gullible Christian.

You can't make the claims that include actual place names, that keep mentioning crowds and crowds of witnesses following wherever you go.

All the skeptics need to do is go to Capernaum and find the only centurion, or go to Nain and find the widow and her son and ask them, did this really happen?

You couldn't invent a religion like that. You wouldn't invent a religion like that. Unless, of course, that that is just what happened. You see, Luke keeps documenting what people did and said and saw.

He's presenting eyewitness testimony. It either did happen or it didn't happen. Luke wants you to be certain. And verse 16, they say, A great prophet has come among us.

- [19:57] God has come to help his people. And Luke presents that as the only logical eyewitness of the events of that day. You see, it's easy to scoff, isn't it?

As though they're ignorant peasants and we're medically superior. In fact, the problem is we spend most of our time avoiding death. I bet they knew death better than we do.

And they look at what happened and put two and two together. And their conclusion is a praise to God. Why? Because they knew that he had turned up to a funeral to help his people.

Verse 17 says, This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country. And for the crowds that day, if you were in the crowd that day, how long would it take for you to stop talking about what you saw?

If I was there that day, I wouldn't shut up about it for years and years. I was at a funeral and the boy got up and started speaking. No kidding.

[21:01] I wouldn't shut up about it for years. The more certain we are about death to life, the more we will keep talking about it.

Just like the crowds of people that day. You see, evangelism, that is, words about Jesus. Evangelism is as much about your belief as it is about the belief of the people you're trying to convert.

But I wonder if this is one miracle that we are less likely to tell people. Bringing dead people to life? Are you sure?

We're risking the wrong sort of reaction. Wow, you poor, gullible Christian. It's easier just to have gentle Jesus, meek and mild, a compassionate teacher.

But the real Jesus brings people from death to life. And why should we keep quiet about that? One of one people that you will meet today need Jesus to sort out their problem of death.

[22:07] Without us, all they have are the stupid ideas of this city. It's a joke. Avoid it. Treat it like a motivator. Something like that. In this story, the centurion's faith is solely built on what he heard people tell him about Jesus.

He was told about a Jesus who could speak and then wow things followed. Which is why he says, verse 7, just say the word and I know that my servant will be healed.

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, rise.

And they will actually rise with new bodies. But more than that, if they are to hear it, you need to realise that this is actually true.

That way, you will be wowed enough not to shut up about it, but to keep talking. Those, if you can't talk to people, put them in front of a Bible.

[23:15] Those Bibles you have in your hands or in your homes, they really aren't safe. They're full of Jesus' words. They really have the power to bring people from death to life.

And maybe they will say, oh, you poor, gullible Christian. But maybe they will say, really? Tell me more. And so, can you ask God to move this truth down several floors lower in your heart?

So that you'll be so wowed, you can't help but tell people. Death to life. It really is reversible. And pray that when they hear it, they would believe, just like the centurion.

What we're going to do now, rather than talk about praying, we're actually going to pray about it. We're going to do it a little bit differently. So, we're going to pray. I'd like you to pray with the people you came with.

If you're happy to pray by yourself, please do that. Two quick prayers. A prayer for you that we would believe that this is actually real. That we would be so wowed by it that we can't help speak.

[24:28] So, pray for us. The second prayer, start naming people that you love in your heart who need Jesus to go from death to life. Who currently are facing death without Jesus.

So, pray for yourself. Pray for your loved ones. And then I will interrupt you in about 90 seconds. If you're comfortable praying by yourself, please do that. Otherwise, please tell the people you're sitting with.

Just name the names who you're going to pray for. Over to you. Make it up as you go. So, I'll interrupt in about 90 seconds. If you'd like to make that your last prayer.

Do join me. Let me lead us in prayer. So, let's pray again. They were filled with awe and praised God.

God has come to help his people. Father, thank you that you came in the person of Jesus, the sovereign Lord, to help us with our biggest problem, sin and death.

[25 : 28] Father, please, would we believe this? Would we be so wowed that this is actually real? So, wowed that it moves several floors lower in our heart so that we can't help but speak about it.

Father, we think about the people we love. Our mothers and fathers, our children, our grandchildren, our brothers and sisters, colleagues, friends. Please name them in your hearts now.

Father, for these people that we have named, please would we open our mouths and speak to them. Please give us opportunities. Please put your Bible in front of them. And we pray, Father, that they would call on Jesus' name and be saved.

That they would put even a simple faith in him. That they would look to Jesus to sort out their biggest problem of death. We pray that they don't go to the grave not knowing Jesus.

Please help us. We carry a burden for them. In your name. Amen.