

Are You The One?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's pray. Father, we're grateful for your good word which gives us life. Give us humble hearts to hear it this morning. Amen.

Amen. Oh, good morning, everybody. We have an enormously rich text before us. Wonderful text. But I must admit, there was a point in my life when I was a very young Christian when texts like this weren't very life-giving. They were discouraging for me, in fact. And let me tell you why. It was through just this terrible sort of misinterpretation. The first story we have is the story of a centurion who has asked Christ to heal his servant. And I'd read that and I'd feel guilty because I'm thinking, man, the message I got from it was this, that if you just have enough faith, amazing miracles will happen in your life.

And so I'd tell myself, Aaron, this is why you have got so many problems. You just don't have enough faith. So I'd try and spend ages trying to ratcheting up my faith, trying to think really positively about things and thinking stuff would just happen. And I remember as a really new Christian trying to perform miracles in my bedroom. And what I do is I try and get God to turn the light on miraculously. And I thought if I could just, you know, if I just believed it enough, maybe it would happen. I have vivid memories of like, okay, God, this time, this time, now. Okay, not now, but maybe now. No. Maybe later. Maybe now. You know, like, just this kind of, you know, ludicrous situation. Fortunately, that's not what the text before us is telling us. That's not the wonderful message we have before us today.

The message we have before us is not about ratchet up your faith, try and think positive. It's trying to tell us about who Christ is. And when we really understand who Christ is, that will shape how we approach him. Now, we have a lot to get through and it's very rich and a lot to remember. So I'm going to give you a three-word rubric to help you stay on track with me, okay? And there's three words here. They are humility, authority, and identity.

So we're going to talk about those three things. All right, let's go through the three little stories that we have. The first one is the healing of the centurion's slave. Now, from the outset, I want you to know that I don't think this little story here is about the healing.

[3 : 0 9] I don't think that's the focus of it. The story doesn't make it the focus. The healing actually gets one line right at the end. Jesus never actually says, be healed. The focus of this story is the attitude of the centurion towards Christ. So we have the centurion. He's got a very sick slave that he clearly cares about. He's heard about Jesus. So he sends a delegation of Jewish elders out to meet with Jesus and try and convince him to come and heal the slave.

Now, listen to how they do it because they approach God wrong. It's an example of how we don't do it. They come up to the centurion and they're like, hey, listen, you know, they come up to Jesus and they say, listen, this centurion, he's a really great guy. He's done good things for us. And it's like they're saying, you kind of owe him. Now, in Roman times, you know, there was a system of patronage. There was a status ladder. And the way people related to each other was through favours. And I think, you know, this delegation, these Jewish elders were in debt to the centurion. And I think they were trying to suck Jesus into this debt favour system. You owe this guy, Jesus. That's why you should come. And if you've been attending church over the last couple of months, you realise that one of the big messages of Luke is that Christ came to undermine that system. The worldly system of status, how people value themselves and flip it on its head. This delegate goes as far as to say, you need to come because this centurion, he's worthy. In summary, what they're saying is this. They say, Jesus, come because he's worthy. Not come because you're worthy. Interesting though, what's interesting about the story is Jesus actually goes along with it. He doesn't disagree with them there. And I think he realises that the centurion is going to come to a conclusion about his own worthiness. So they're getting closer to the house and the centurion sends out another delegation, this time his friends. And they say something interesting. They say to Jesus, stop, don't come. And they pass on a message from the centurion, I am not worthy to have you under my roof. So something has clearly happened to the centurion. Somehow he realises he's not dealing with an ordinary person and that maybe compared to this person, he's not worthy. And it's a vivid picture, a wonderful picture of how we should approach God. So this centurion, he's obviously a very wealthy man, wealthy enough to build the Jewish people in his area like a synagogue.

He's a man that's got a lot of status. He's in charge of probably a hundred soldiers. So he's a picture of Roman power and majesty. On the status ladder, he's right up there. And yet he says to Christ, I'm not worthy. I'm not worthy. Our model for approaching God. That's our model for approaching God. No matter how good we think we are, how important we are, how many accolades we have, you know, if we have really great church attendance, if we give, if we read our Bible all the time, pray with that, you know, we're still, those are all good things, but it doesn't make us worthy.

It's not something we can earn. You know, it's very easy for us to sort of, you know, and I've done this, come to Christ, I'm like, I'm praying to my God and in the back of my head, I'm thinking, yeah, I've read my Bible every day this week. So, you know, probably should answer this one because we're in pretty good shape at the moment.

I'm saying, God, I'm worthy. But none of us are worthy. We are all in desperate need for Christ's mercy in our life. And it's why we approach God with humility.

[8 : 06] And it's why one of the first things we do in our service is we kneel. So, humility. Approaching God with humility. That's the first word of our three-word rubric there.

There's a very sad verse in this passage and it's verse 30. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the purposes of God for themselves.

You know, they didn't want to be baptized. They didn't want to submit. And why didn't they want to do that? Because they believed they had it. We've made it. You know, we're part of this little privileged group.

We're worthy. We're worthy. And what happened? They missed the purpose of God in their life. You are going to miss many things in your life.

You are going to miss buses and appointments. Don't miss that. But our approach to God does not end with us recognizing our unworthiness.

[9 : 16] As you might know, I work for the church. I'm the evangelist. And when I'm talking to people about Jesus, and I'm trying to summarize it a bit, I don't say to them, hey, listen, you should know you're a miserable sinner.

Do you want to come to church with me? That's not the gospel. That's not the gospel message there.

It doesn't end with us recognizing our unworthiness, because we go on to recognize Christ's worthiness. And that's what the centurion does. You don't need to come to my house, he says.

Just say the word and my guy will be healed. He recognizes the authority that Christ has. He knows there's something about this man. And in fact, he seems to be happy about this.

Like, he's quite joyful, it seems to me. Like, you read it, he goes on to explain the authority that Christ has, by using an example from his own life. You can almost see it.

[10 : 29] He's like, you know, Christ has authority. It's kind of like this. Let me tell you something about my life. I'm a man in authority. I tell my slaves, go, now go, come, come. My servants, go, go, come, come.

My soldiers, go, go, come. You can see he's kind of excited about this. There is a joy in recognizing that though we aren't worthy, Christ is worthy. And Jesus is amazed at this man's faith.

He gets something. And one of the great ironies of this story is that he gets something that the rest of them, I don't think they get quite yet.

And what's ironic is that this is the guy with the most status. He's the guy that's really up there.

He's got the power. He's got the money. But he gets it. And that's amazing, I think, because, you know, status, having high status can be incredibly deceptive.

[11 : 34] Being thought well off. Having a lot of security around you. That stuff is, none of that stuff's bad, but it can deceive you.

I used to do a lot of youth work in New Zealand, and a woman I worked with, she was spending a lot of time, she had this kind of like club going with these girls from a local high school, and she was trying to share with them Jesus.

And one day they had a very frank discussion about God. And the girls said to her, and not so many words, but basically this was the message. They said, Kim, you know, let's call her Kim.

Kim, we are, you know, we're young, we're doing really well at school. We go to this wonderful private school. We look, you know, we're attractive.

We have lots of friends. We love our parents. They love us. I get on with the rest of my family. The future's looking really good for me. Why do I need Jesus?

[12 : 40] Their perceived status made them blind to their real status. And it's very easy for that to happen.

Our friend in this story, the centurion, we don't know the exact nature of his faith, but he understood something profound. I mean, I wish I had a little postlude here.

You know those stories you hear about the little boy? You know, the little boy who does something really good or really bad and then at the end of the story you go, and that little boy, do you know what his name was?

Winston Churchill. You know, that's kind of... It's amazing. No, we don't have that story here. He didn't turn out to be Constantine or anything like that, you know, which would have been remarkable.

But he's such a wonderful example for us on how we approach Christ with humility, recognizing Christ's worthiness, his authority.

[13 : 45] It's our second word. Okay, the next, the next little story, Jesus raises the widow's son. It follows on really well from this story because the previous story, humility, authority, this story is also about authority and how far the authority of Christ actually extends.

It's a beautiful story. It's verses 11 to 17 here. We can spend like a minute on it, unfortunately. So the woman has lost all her means of support. She's a widow.

That's a problem. Now she's lost her son. That's a huge problem. She is destitute. Now, as we've seen in the previous weeks, these healings are often pictures of what salvation look like, what the kingdom of God look like.

And in this, I think what's happening is that it's saying, you know, because the previous story, we have somebody of very high status. Christ comes to that person.

Now we have somebody of very low status. Christ comes to that person. The message is, salvation is for all of us. For all of us.

[15 : 01] But I think more importantly, the story is about the depth of Christ's authority. In the previous story, Christ's authority was seen to have power over sickness. Here, it's power over death.

That's, that's some pretty huge authority right there. Over death. In a, in a congregation of this size, I'm sure that there are people right now who are facing terrible circumstances in your life.

And you wonder where the Christ's authority extends to you. And I think the wonderful news of this is it does, even to death.

Our story of the widow's son ends with something interesting. The man is brought back to life. And how do the people react?

They call him a great prophet. They say, God has visited us. You know, it's probably the best they can come up with at the time. But they do misrepresent Christ.

[16 : 16] Or they misunderstand him. Which leads us very nicely into the last little section. which focuses on identity.

The third word, identity. Identity. So, from verses 18 to 30, I'll be concentrating on the first half though, mostly.

This is an odd situation, I think. Because we have John the Baptist, he's sending his disciples out to meet Jesus and ask them a question. Are you the one?

Now, we don't know exactly what's going through John's mind. We can speculate and I can give you a lot of options, but I think the best explanation of what's going on here is that John is having doubts.

He wanted to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. He's trapped in prison at the moment, he's in prison. He's a crazy man. He's used to being out in the wild and running around and now he's in this little tiny cell and the only things he hears about Jesus are from the reports that he gets back from his disciples.

[17 : 32] And I think he really is going, yep, at the baptism, I think this is looking good. This might be the Messiah. I'm feeling pretty good about this. But he starts to hear these reports about what Jesus is doing and it doesn't fit with his idea of what a Messiah should be doing.

there are no big messianic power plays happening in his mind. You know, John was John was hardcore. He's probably thinking where are the armies of God amassing to destroy our enemies?

Where is the wrath of God to annihilate the sinners? And what's Jesus doing? He's hanging around with widows, prostitutes, tax collectors, Gentiles.

John wanted to hear the wrath of God is on the march and Christ said, the mercy of God is here.

The mercy of God is here. Are you the one? Are you the one is the question they ask him. Are you the one? Jesus doesn't say yes, he just tells him what he's been doing.

[18 : 57] Justice is coming, but first is mercy. Do you need God's mercy this morning?

I hope these verses have been an encouragement to you. As you read them for yourself and think about them, you know, let that question ring in your ears. Are you the one?

And if you come up with the answer yes, this man, this man that's talked about here, this is the Christ, this is God, then that should have a profound effect on your life.

Because this man has authority over all creation, even death. Has the power to destroy, but was withholding it.

because he comes with mercy. And how do we approach this Christ who does these things, who acts like this?

[20 : 16] We approach Christ on our knees. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Please kneel for prayer. Heavenly Father, we praise you for you are worthy.

Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God, the Almighty. Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations. Lord, we thank you so much for your son, Jesus.

Thank you that you sent him into this world as the Messiah and that every promise finds its yes in him. We praise you for you are a God of compassion and mercy and you have loved us from before the creation of the world.

We ask that you keep teaching us about yourself as we read the book of Luke. Lord, we know that you are sovereign over all things and that you are at work in this world. God, we think of the current financial crisis that our world is facing.

[21 : 29] We pray, we think particularly of those people whose lives have been directly impacted. Father, we pray that your hand will be on this situation, that you will provide guidance and wisdom for those making important decisions and Lord, that you also provide for those who have lost jobs or lost hope at this time.

Comfort them and surround them with your love. Father, there are many places that are war-torn or in turmoil at this current time. We pray specifically for Zimbabwe and Burma.

Father, there is such unrest and evil in these places. We ask that you will work to bring change and that aid will be provided and accepted by these places, places such as these that really need it.

Lord, look after your people there, build them up and strengthen them as they face hardship and persecution. Heavenly Father, we also lift up to you the millions of people who are in poverty, who have no home or shelter or who are facing starvation.

Lord, sustain and provide for them and make us who are so abundantly wealthy, mindful and compassionate towards those who are in such great need. Lord, by your Spirit, create in us a burning desire to care for all the people of the world and love them as you have loved us.

[22 : 45] Help us to be generous with what you have so generously given to us. Gracious Father, we thank you that Canada is a country in which we are freely able to worship you. God, we pray for our city.

Vancouver needs Jesus. The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. We ask you, Lord of the harvest, to raise up and send out labourers into your harvest here in Vancouver.

We pray that many will hear the good news of the gospel and be saved. Lord, we think of those who don't know you, particularly those who are close to us, family and friends.

Lord, we earnestly ask that you will soften their hearts and provide us with opportunities to talk to them about Jesus. Father, we know that you'd love to answer this prayer so please equip us with boldness and let your Holy Spirit work powerfully in us to give us the right words to say.

But even more than this, Lord, help us to live lives that reflect your glory so that every action we take marks us as followers of Christ. Lord, we also lift up to you those who are sick or sad in our congregation and others that we know of.

[23 : 52] we ask that you to bring healing where healing is needed and Father, we ask that you be with them, make your love known to them and let them be comforted. We pray specifically for Rowena, Ben and Nancy, Mark, Fiona, Paul and Wynne.

Lord, we also remember May ran it before you and Father, watch over our troops in Afghanistan, especially Christopher on deployment there. We pray for safety and peace of mind.

Father God, we pray for all the different ministries and Bible studies at St John's. We pray for your continued blessing on them and keep growing us in Christ. Finally, Lord, we thank you for the hope we have in heaven where there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain, where we will dwell with you forever.

Father, we ask that you keep this great hope in the forefront of our minds and it will shape how we live and interact with others. We ask all these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.