

Luke 7:1-10 - Impressing Jesus

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

If you have a Bible with you, open them to Luke chapter 7. We're continuing in our journey through the gospel of Luke.

And this morning we're going to look at this situation here with Jesus meeting this Roman centurion where he begins to demonstrate a lot of things he has just taught in this sermon which we've just finished going through.

So let me read for us from Luke 7, beginning of verse 1. We're going to read down through verse 10. 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. And when the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews asking him to come and heal his servant.

[1 : 23] 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 one who built us our synagogue.

And Jesus went with them. But 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.

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. And 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.

[2 : 42] You know, one of the things I love about really the whole of the Bible, but especially when we come to the Gospels, is stories.

I mean, I love stories. I think we all love stories. And one of the things about Luke, and it's a little different than especially, say, Matthew, Luke, we find very few extended sections that are just him explaining the kingdom.

Where he's teaching us truths. Far more often than not, you have these stories that paint a picture of these principles that Jesus is communicating about the reality of this new kingdom that he brings in.

And this is one of those examples. He's just finished, probably in the Gospel of Luke, the longest section of teaching that we have. But now, immediately, Luke is going to give us a pair of stories. And we're going to look at one this week and another one next week that illustrates all that he has just said about the kingdom.

[3 : 59] This week, we have the healing of this servant of a Gentile who expresses faith. But then next week, we're going to see how he returns a dead son alive to his widowed mother.

And both of these are going to reflect something different about the kingdom. And in some ways, they are both scandalous. Because they fly directly in the face of common thought.

And so today, we're going to look at the kingdom, and we're going to look at kingdom faith. What does kingdom faith look like? You know, and you have to say, when you say that you have faith, when you say your friends have faith, what do you look for in yourself or in someone else that says, yeah, they really do have faith?

And if it's true faith, you know, what distinguishes that? So as Jesus just taught in this previous sermon, that you'll know a tree by its fruits.

And so he says, a good tree is going to produce good fruits. A bad tree produces bad fruit. You know that tree by the fruit it produces. What does the kingdom, what does faith, this kingdom faith, produce in us that demonstrates that fruit of the kingdom?

[5 : 40] And so Luke is going to show us in this section. Again, it's a scandalous section in a couple of ways. But he's going to show us and demonstrate for us what this kingdom faith is.

And if you really do want to impress Jesus, this is how to do it. So, really we just see two things. The first is kingdom faith.

It's always in a downward movement. We're going to see it in both of these. But it first moves downward in humility. Here's the story. What's going on here?

Jesus has just finished teaching. And now he is moving towards Capernaum with this huge posse with him.

In some ways, Luke at this point doesn't even give it much thought. Though we're going to see it come into play in the next story. Jesus has just finished teaching about all this new system of values.

[6 : 43] And now he's going to demonstrate in a very clear, very major way what he was trying to explain.

And so as he's approaching the city, he is met by this group of Jewish elders. These are leaders in this community.

And they've been sent to him on behalf of a Roman centurion. See, that in itself would make us scratch our heads.

Because what do these Jews, what are they having to do, what do they have to do with this Roman centurion? These Romans were the occupying army.

They were the force in Palestine then, in Israel, that the Jews hated. They hated them almost as much as they did Samaritans.

[7 : 45] But they hated the Romans because typically Roman centurions were not nice people. They could be, in many occasions, brutal.

They were captors. They were occupiers. And the Jews were captives. And so many times that's the way they treated them.

So what's going on here? The Jews have come to Jesus, these Jewish leaders, and they're kind of pleading this guy's case.

They're making a case with Jesus that this guy deserves Jesus' help. That's a little weird.

What are they doing? Well, is this Roman actually that nice a guy? Maybe. Maybe. I mean, we see here, the way Luke describes him, he's got a tender heart, especially towards this servant of his.

[8 : 52] And he's obviously done some good things for the Jewish community. So maybe there's something very tender about him and that he has indeed won the affections of his captives.

There might be something else going on here. The way that society operated and worked in these kind of situations was on a quid pro quo basis.

Jesus, if I do good for you, that means you owe me. And so what the Romans would do sometimes with their captives is, you know, the centurion spent money, you know, built their synagogue and so forth.

But what he could be doing here with that is buying peace. I'll build your synagogue.

You don't give me any trouble. And so the Jews, in a sense, you know, maybe what he's doing here with these Jewish elders is calling in his debts.

[10 : 10] So, yeah, maybe he did love this servant of his and this servant was obviously very valuable. And so he needed help. And now he has heard that there's this guy named Jesus out here who could bring life and healing back to my servant.

So, the elders come and are trying to build a case for this centurion's worthiness.

That word worthy is the key here. It's one of these key ideas because, you know, the Jews operate on this basis as well.

What you do, how you behave, your standing in society, all of that makes you worthy. And the basic meaning of that word worthy is kind of substantive or heavy.

You have weight to your life or you are valuable. You are somebody. And that is, you find worth on the basis of how you live, the good things you do, and so forth.

[11 : 36] And so that's the system. That's simply the way the world works here. And it's the way the Jews are working. Yes, this guy was a foreigner. Yes, in normal circumstances, they wouldn't have

anything to do with him.

But in this case, they are coming and trying to build a case. Now, the amazing thing here is Jesus goes.

He never says a word about it. He just goes with him. And now what this does, it sets up a whole new crisis.

Because a centurion hears that he's coming. And there's something else about society. This Jewish teacher cannot come into the house of a Gentile.

And so, the centurion in some ways panics. And he sends a whole different group of people to Jesus.

[12:44] These are not Jewish elders that he's using to get something. Now he's got friends. And now they're saying something whole different. Something totally different about this Roman.

He's not worthy. He's a Roman. He says, I am not worthy for you to enter under my roof.

Enter into my house. And the word that their centurion uses. It's like, I'm insufficient. I am a nobody.

In regard to you, comparison to you, I am not enough for you to care.

And so, from a distance, he sends these friends to Jesus. Because basically, the Gentile says, I have no right to expect you to help me.

But, you know, if you just say the word, which we'll look at in just a minute. But there is in this world this system of worth and value.

[13:57] And unfortunately, in that system, it's all based on what you do. Who you are. And this is what Jesus came to bring it into.

Unfortunately, that same kind of system is what we have here. What makes you think that you are worthy to expect Jesus to come to you and to give you help?

You know, help is given to those who are worthy of it. You know, we operate this way. If someone were to come to you and ask for financial help, they need money from you.

What are you looking for in them that would make them worthy of your help? What if they were standing there puffing on a cigarette in front of you? What if they had the smell of alcohol on their breath?

What if they were dressed very clearly as if they belonged to another religion? What would disqualify them from you giving them help?

[15:17] Would they be worthy? What makes us worthy? To ask and to expect something. But, you know, that is as big a question as that is.

How do you approach God yourself? You need Him to work for you? You need something? You've got something going on in your life?

And it's very, very dear to you. What gives you the right to go before God and expect Him to answer your prayer and to meet you in that need?

Have you done enough? Are you good enough? You know, a few years ago, well, let me just say this first. A lot of us know intellectually that there's nothing we can do.

But that's not the way we function. Some years ago, when not long I had actually become a Christian, I joined the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ.

[16:32] I was going to become a missionary. And I had, I was at new staff training, and they were trying to decide where I should fit, what ministry I should go into.

And I had just auditioned for the music ministry. Not very well, I might say. But I auditioned. And that's where I really wanted to be placed. I didn't want to go just work on a college campus somewhere.

I wanted to work with these music groups that they had. And so, you know, in that anxious time of waiting, and this was something I really, really wanted.

And so I decided, you know, maybe I ought to pray about this. But I was like, oh, my God. And so I remember, I went up one evening. They had a, at the camp, the staff training grounds where I was, they had a chapel.

And so I decided, let me, I'm just, I'm going to go up there in the quiet and the private, and I'm going to pray. But as I went up there and started praying, I realized something.

[17:40] That's the first time I had really prayed in a long time. I hadn't really, as far as my time and efforts go, I hadn't paid God much attention at all.

Yeah, I was in training to be a missionary. And I wasn't in his word. I wasn't praying. And there were just other things in my life that were inconsistent with all of this.

And it hit me that God, and I just started kind of rattling all this off. And I said, I really don't have much right to ask you for this.

And it was kind of like, you know, this is a very un-Presbyterian thing. It was almost like God actually responded. To that prayer. And as clear as it could be in my mind, this thought came. And it says, okay, what difference would it have made if you had done all those things? Would you be more worthy?

[18:51] Well, no. See, I was very, very determined to make myself acceptable.

I was determined that I was going to make myself good enough where I could be approved because I'd behaved well enough so that God would, that I would feel confident that God would actually come and take my desires to heart and meet me and answer my prayer.

I was trying to be worthy. Well, what's keeping you from asking God for something that's very, very dear to your heart?

And I don't know what that might be. It might be something that you really want. It might be him taking away something you really don't want. But that request, what is it?

And see, a lot of times we hesitate to come before God because, yeah, I'm not good with devotional times. Oh, yeah, I've been going the wrong places on my computer.

[20:13] Oh, yeah, I mean, I have just yelled at my kids for the seventh time and it's barely lunch. Why would I think that God would listen to me?

Why would I think he would have anything to do with my desires? See, in the old system, worthiness is on what we do.

But there's a new system. And Jesus went to the Gentiles' home without a word, without hesitation, because there's a new system.

That those who are the least worthy can be made worthy, but not because of their lineage, not because of their religion, not because of their behavior, but because of what he was about to do. The Holy One of Israel was about to embrace unworthiness. The Holy One of Israel was about to enter in the sewer of human depravity and take it away.

[21:56] And he was going to embrace it so that us who are lost in it and stuck in it we who cannot be good enough ever can be made worthy.

And how worthy has he made us? that same Holy One of Israel has now declared that through his work, through his death, through his intervention, has made me not only acceptable enough that he would enter into my dwelling, he's chosen to take up residence there.

the Holy One has cleansed me so fully, so completely, and has made me so ultimately beautiful that he says, I'll come.

No problem. I'm on my way. There's nothing to keep us from inviting him and expecting him to hear us and to bless us.

Nothing. Faith embraces the humility of unworthiness because we have a Savior that we trust and makes us worthy.

[24:09] Secondly, faith moving downward now in submission. You know, when the centurion, and this is the part that sometimes we might scratch our heads about this, and this is okay, as soon as, you know, with the second group of people he sends them to Jesus, and the reason he tells Jesus, no, don't come, he gets into this discussion of authority and it's kind of this hierarchy of authority.

And what's this all about? And he says, Jesus, look, just say the word because I understand authority.

I mean, I'm a centurion. I got guys under me. I tell one, do this, and he does it, and go here, and he goes, and so all you've got to do is say the word.

And see, obviously, the centurion has heard the stories about Jesus and what he's doing and how he's not only teaching with authority, he's been working with authority, something that the Jewish elders in a lot of ways were blind to, but he's caught on.

This guy's got authority, and he can speak, and all he's got to do is speak, and it's done. And so he's, this centurion is submitting himself to the authority of Jesus.

[25:46] And Jesus hears this. Jesus was impressed. The text says he marveled. And he says, in all Israel, and here's the scandal of the story, in all Israel, I have not seen such faith, and that faith came from a scum Roman centurion.

because he understood the dynamics of a new kingdom. This is huge.

This whole idea of authority is huge for me. For the centurion, he was dealing with this physical illness of this beloved servant, and all he knew that all Jesus had to do was to speak into this, and this servant would be healed.

you know, for us, the issue might be a little less material. You know, what has Jesus already said to me about me that I simply do not believe or that I openly reject and that I cannot, I will not accept? what has he said? What has he already declared? Well, who's the one in your life?

[27 : 21] And I have asked the question, you know, who's the one in my life that actually has the authority to speak into my heart and I will submit and believe and accept what they say?

Is it a parent? Maybe a spouse? Do we live with parents who are speaking into our lives and what they're saying actually is not very good but yet we believe and we live under this burden of what they're declaring about us?

are we living in slavery to certain people because we need their words to speak into us that we actually have value?

Who is it in your life that can speak and you're going to believe and accept and embrace? Who has the authority?

You know, because of these voices sometimes we can either feel very defeated, very worthless, very small, enslaved.

[28 : 48] You know, some of the loudest voices that we believe unfortunately are our own. we don't need somebody else. Some of those voices simply say, I'll look in the mirror and it says, I'm a failure, I am a zero.

I am insignificant. I mean nothing to no one. Now, what I'm talking about here in getting into is not psychological gymnastics.

Psychology today will tell you, you know, you might think this is just well, positive speak. We need to have positive messages. We need to speak to ourselves and listen to the positive messages that people give us and ignore the negative ones and so that we can have a better image of ourselves and you know, I'm not talking about that because what psychology does unfortunately is just saying giving us positive messages and they're ignoring the truth and what is the truth?

truth. One of my spiritual mentors had this saying and he says, you know, when people criticize you, rejoice because it's not anything as bad as the reality.

reality. What modern psychology today does is ignore the reality. I am unworthy.

[30 : 42] I am broken. I'm a mess. And this is the paradox or the crazy thing about Christianity because what Christianity says, what the gospel says about it, the gospel is by far the most absolutely negative message we could hear, but at the same time the most glorious.

Because the gospel says you are far worse than you ever believed. But you're far more beloved than you ever dreamed.

And so the voice of Jesus says what to us? it says, yep, you got a problem.

You got a big one. You have no clue. You're a broken mess and there's not one single thing you can do to take care of it.

He doesn't stop there. what does he also say? You're forgiven. You're accepted.

[32 : 10] You're approved. You are righteous. You are beloved. You are beloved. Now how are you going to listen to?

does Jesus have the authority to speak truth into your heart?

Because this is the truth. This is what he comes to do. faith always begins moving downward. Always. It is grasping the truth of my unworthiness. But faith also submits to the declaration that comes from the cross that it is finished.

That we who believe him are in Christ. And there is now no barrier to keep us away.

[33 : 35] To keep us from expecting anything other than God's ultimate good. That is kingdom faith.

Is that what you have? Is that yours? Are you still living a life trying to improve so you'll get a hearing?

Are you still living a life that's trying to earn it on your own? Are you still or have you just maybe given up and you quit asking God for anything because you can't get there?

Let's see a new system has come inaugurated by the king himself that it's not up to you.

You come to him and he takes care of all of it. In Christ through going down and accepting your unworthiness submitting ourselves to his declaration of us we can fully expect this good king to hear

our cries and to meet us in our needs because he has declared us worthy.

[35 : 20] Let's pray. Father what you have done to make us your own what you have done to make us suitable for you to dwell a place where you can dwell what you have done to make us your very sons and daughters oh father would you speak truth into our hearts expose our natural brokenness expose that unworthiness that we did earn but then show us the ultimate gift of the cross where all was done show us that we might more fully and readily run to you with our hearts with our needs we pray in Jesus name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org