

Transcript

The Jesus Story - A Servant and a Dead Son

In Luke chapter six, the chapter closed with Luke's account of The Sermon on the Plain. Now, this is how Luke continues in chapter seven:

1 When He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum.

This really is the beginning of a very remarkable story. We need to take a closer look and get the context clear in our minds.

As Jesus comes into Capernaum, the crowd that's been with him no doubt follows him into Capernaum, and this is now the base town for his ministry.

Capernaum has been the scene of some remarkable miracles already. Jesus is well-known here; he's spoken in the synagogue; he's healed in the synagogue; he's healed the son of a royal official working for the ruler of that area.

This is what we read in Matthew 8:14 when Jesus visited the home of Peter:

14 Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever.

15 So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them.

16 When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick.

The people in Capernaum are very familiar with what Jesus' ministry is all about. In fact, they'd probably seen more of Jesus' ministry than anyone else in the whole country because this had become his headquarters and he must have spent quite a lot of time there.

Here in Luke chapter seven, we shall be looking at what could well be described as Compassion in Action. One commentator tells us that compassion simply means: 'Your pain in my heart'. I wonder just what pain Jesus must have felt as He ministered from place to place.

In this chapter alone, Jesus is confronted with the distress of four hurting people and we see how Jesus responds to their needs.

We have a dying servant, and a grieving widow, a confused prophet, and a repentant sinner, and Jesus helped them all because compassion does not measure, it ministers.

Justice will always seek out the merits of the case, but compassion only sees the need. It was compassion, not justice, that motivated Jesus.

Now, chapter eight begins by telling us that Jesus was met by a deputation of Jewish elders, who came to intercede with Him on behalf of a centurion whose servant was lying dangerously ill, and evidently at the point of death:

2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die.

3 So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant.

4 And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving,

5 "for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue."

6 Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him,

7 "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.

8 "For I also am a man placed under authority, having 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."

9 When Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"

10 And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.

The story of the centurion and his terminally ill servant speaks to us on various levels. This is the story of an army officer who cares about his servant. There is something very likeable about this centurion who sent elders of the Jews to Jesus, pleading that Jesus would come and heal his servant who was sick to the point of death.

He was a man of some status in the nation of Rome, being a commander of a hundred or more troops. And he was loved by the Jews, as we read here, because he had been very generous. He was obviously a man of wealth and had spent his money to build a synagogue for the Jewish people there in Capernaum.

The Jews came to Jesus and asked Him to help this man because in their words: "He is worthy". Notice the remarkable concern and care that this powerful and wealthy man had for a servant; for a servant who had no social standing in the community. Yet this man was so concerned about the well-being of his servant that he sent the message to Jesus pleading for Jesus to come and heal his servant.

In the Gospels and the book of Acts, Roman centurions are presented as quality men of character, and this centurion is a sterling example.

The Jewish elders had little love for the Romans in general and Roman soldiers in particular, and yet the elders commended this officer to Jesus. He loved the Jewish

people in Capernaum and even built them a synagogue. And, he loved his servant and did not want him to die.

This centurion was not a man who insulated himself from the pain of others. He had a heart of concern, even for his lowly servant who was dying. So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant.

I believe that there is a lesson for us all here: "When he heard about Jesus", "Faith comes by hearing". We have a great example of faith here: the centurion hears about Jesus then asks Jesus to come and heal his servant.

This account here tells us of a proud military leader who is so humble that he sends others to ask Jesus' help. We are impressed not only with this man's great love, but also his great humility.

Imagine a Roman officer telling a poor Jewish rabbi that he was unworthy to have Him enter his house! The Romans were not known for displaying humility, especially before their Jewish subjects. But the characteristic that most impressed Jesus was the man's faith.

The centurion is deeply respected by the religious community in Capernaum. Though he is not Jewish, he is certainly sympathetic to the Jewish faith. "He loves our nation," the community elders tell Jesus, "and has built our synagogue."

For a non-Jew to get the leaders of the synagogue to "plead earnestly" with Jesus on his behalf says a lot about the esteem in which they held him.

The respectable Jews were often too proud to have any association with a non-Jew. This centurion was clearly an exception. This centurion is a deeply humble man.

Centurions don't lead by being bashful or self-effacing. Yet this centurion never actually appears personally before Jesus to plead his cause. Instead, he sends others in his place, not as a tactical move in order to get Jesus to agree to his request. Clearly it is because of a sense of personal unworthiness.

The thing about this centurion is that he combined great humility with great boldness. He felt utterly unworthy that Jesus should give him anything, but he asked anyway!

In verse four we read: "they begged Him earnestly". In verse six we read: "Jesus went with them". Jesus answered immediately.

Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed."

A centurion, a very powerful man, shows a great deal of humility. The centurion's friends are told to say, "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof". He called Jesus "Lord," indicating his respect for Jesus.

This Gentile understood more than most of the Jews of Jesus' day; he saw Jesus' superiority. He saw that Jesus' had authority that was greater than his own and that

Jesus did not have to personally visit his home. The centurion understood that Jesus needed only to say the word to heal the servant.

Most of the people who came to Jesus sought to get close enough to touch him in order to be healed. But this centurion knew that Jesus could also heal without touching anyone. His word would be enough.

Here is a foreigner, who understands better than any of his day just how far Jesus' authority extends and how it operates. The centurion's faith is simple but not simplistic. The centurion understands that all authority comes ultimately from God.

With his military background he is familiar with a chain of command. Orders are received and then channelled to others. The centurion realizes that the very power of God resides in Jesus, and he suggests that this power could flow from God through Jesus to heal his faithful servant.

8 "For I also am a man placed under authority, having 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."

9 When Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"

10 And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.

Here is the most incredible fact of all: he believed that Jesus could do anything by word of mouth alone, whether he was present or not. That is astonishing faith. Jesus had already been healing people by laying his hands on them and touching them.

This man is convinced that Jesus didn't even need to come and touch the servant. Wherever you are, just say the word.

Most people needed the touch of Jesus or needed to feel the hem of his garment or to have some tangible sign of Jesus' presence so they might believe in his power but not this man. This centurion has a very clear sense of who Jesus is and what his level of authority is. His humility is grounded in a profound respect for Jesus' position.

In comparison, the centurion sees himself as unworthy to even invite Jesus to be a guest in his home. And since he sees himself as undeserving, he is all the more aware of the pure grace with which Jesus operates.

The centurion has a profound understanding without even meeting Jesus in person. The centurion expresses his confidence in the ability of Jesus to heal his servant:

9 When Jesus heard these things, He marvelled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"

This was the opinion that Jesus had of the centurion: a Gentile, a non-Jew, who was putting to shame the very people who had been waiting for centuries for the coming of Messiah, the Son of God.

Then we have the elders' opinion of the centurion. The 'elders of the Jews' besought the Lord for this centurion saying that "he was worthy for whom He should do this."

It is perhaps worth noting that there are four Roman centurions mentioned in the New Testament and they are a great when compared to the Roman governors. The centurion in charge of the Crucifixion when he had seen it all, this is what he said: "Truly this Man was the Son of God."

Cornelius, the centurion mentioned in Acts 10, is described as a 'just man, and one that fears God.'

Julius, the centurion guarding Paul, Acts 27 it tells us that he 'courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty.'

The centurion in our text was perhaps one of the most lovable men in the New Testament. A citizen of the great Roman Empire, an officer in the all-victorious army. The centurion's estimate of himself "I am not worthy, but you say the word, and my servant shall be healed."

A sense of our own unworthiness and a sense of the preciousness of Jesus always go together; they are never separated. Those who have the highest views of Jesus Christ have the lowest views of themselves.

The opinion that Jesus had of this centurion was that his faith was greater than any he had seen in Israel. Jesus is amazed that a Gentile got it right when so many of the Jews did not.

Luke now goes on to give an account of something that none of the other gospel writers record: the story of the widow of Nain, Luke 11–17:

11 Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd.

12 When He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her.

13 When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

14 Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."

15 So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

16 Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people."

17 And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

What a contrast this woman makes with the centurion. He is a strong, commanding type of man with ample resources and many noble works to his credit. She is a weak desolate widow. Now she was following her only son to the grave.

When Jesus moved with compassion, stopped the sad procession of death, raised the young man to life, and gave him to his mother, notice the verb: he 'gave' him to her. In that wonderful moment no conditions were laid down, no promises extracted. The awesome gift of new, unexpected life was apparently an unconditional gift, an action of the unqualified grace of God.

To get the best out of this incident we need to look a little closer at this story:

12 And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out

Places for the burial of the dead were outside the towns so that ceremonial uncleanness could be avoided. The Jews were careful to give public expression to their sympathy for those who were bereaved.

The death of an only child represented to them, as to us, a time of extreme of sorrow, but in this case the sorrow was made far worse by the fact that the mother was a widow, and so she was evidently dependent upon her son for support. Now that her son was dead, there was none left to support her.

As the funeral procession came out of the gate, they met Jesus with his company coming in. So there would be many witnesses to what followed. But this miracle was not to demonstrate the power of Jesus. One part of the ministry of Jesus, while here on earth, is described very clearly in Acts 10:38:

38 "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

Jesus had no other business in Nain but to do good. We may well believe that he went there for the express purpose of comforting this forlorn mother.

This miracle is a striking instance of the sovereignty of God. Sometimes God may act in an amazing way just because he wants to and for his own reasons.

This miracle was not done because a needy person asked for it. Sometimes a miracle takes place because someone other than the needy person asks for it. But this miracle took place just because Jesus wanted it to.

So, soon after the previous miracle, Jesus visits a city called Nain about twenty-five miles south of Capernaum and as he enters the city he passes a funeral procession. Jesus is full of compassion for the weeping mother and a large crowd from the city was with her:

13 When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her: "Do not weep."

14 Then He came and touched the open coffin and those who carried him stood still.

Jesus had authority over death, He touched this open coffin. The bearers stood still. They stood there as amazed and stunned as the woman was.

When Jesus spoke again, it wasn't to the pallbearers and it wasn't to the mother. This time, Jesus spoke to the young man who was dead and He said: "Young man, I say to you, arise."

But I want you to notice that the feelings of Jesus were translated into practical help. Compassion is of no use unless it is turned into action. So his pity and compassion turned into action and he did a number of surprising things.

First, he ordered the woman to stop crying. A very strong word is used here in the Greek. "Stop crying! Stop it!" Then Jesus said something to the young man – to a corpse. Jesus said: "Get up young man. Sit up."

What would you have felt in that moment? What do you suppose the mother felt? What do you suppose the young man felt? When Jesus raised people from the dead, all that He needed was the same power He displayed the day before in healing the centurion's servant.

It took from Jesus only a word from His mouth: And He said: "Young man, I say to you, arise." So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

The greatest display of power on Earth is seen when death is reversed. The greatest power there is in this world, other than God himself, is the power of death. But Jesus' almighty power can reverse even death itself. In a matter of a few seconds, a lifeless corpse becomes a living person.

This is the same Jesus who told Martha in John 11:25:

25 "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

26 "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.

And then in verse forty three Jesus gives a demonstration of His awesome power.

43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"

44 And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

45 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.

Back to our story. The woman did not ask for the miracle. So far as we know she was not exercising any special faith. It was entirely the compassion of Jesus that led to his acting the way that he did. He acted in the power of his own faith.

When God acts in sovereign freedom it is always a display of his mercy. God is free to do just what he likes, but what he likes is mercy! And He presented him to his mother. As the full demonstration of his compassion.

This scene is a foretaste of something that is going to happen in the future. This describes how Jesus will restore loved ones to loved ones in the glorious morning of the resurrection.

Now here is a great thought to hang on to. On the last day, in the twinkle of an eye, Jesus is going to say to all who are dead in Christ: "Arise!" and we will join with them in the power and the glory of His resurrection, and children will be presented to parents, husbands to wives, parents to children in the great resurrection. What a day of rejoicing that is going to be.

This is something that I don't think we dwell on enough. In 1 Thessalonians 4:14 this is what we read:

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

But, here there must be a word of warning. Have we done everything that needs to be done? As with all journeys there are things that need taking care of preparations to be made, things to be sorted out before we go.

What happens if you are going abroad and you get to the departure gate only to find that your passport out of date. Well the answer is very simple: no valid passport, no flight. But, all that you will miss is a holiday.

But what will happen when the Lord returns to take His waiting people home. We can't afford to arrive at the departure lounge for heaven only to find that we have no valid passport. We need to make sure that our travel documents are all in order. Have we got our title deeds to our mansion in the sky in order?

This is the most important decision that we will ever make because an eternity in either Heaven or Hell will depend on this.

There is only one way that anyone will get into heaven. This is what Jesus tells us in John 14:6:

6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

In Acts 2 after that great message from Peter, those who listened to him ask the question: "What shall we do?" This was Peter's reply:

38 Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39 “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.”

40 And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.”

The first step was Repent. The second step we find In the next verse, when we read the crowds response. They were obedient:

41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

What was the third step for these new converts? We read this in verse 42:

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

"What shall we do?", was the question the crowd asked. This was time for their spiritual check up. Three very simple steps were set out, to pass this test. The first thing that Peter told them to do was to, “Repent. That was the first step.

The second step was 'let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins'. The crowd's response was immediate:

41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

What was the next step for these new converts?

42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Let me finish by quoting Paul the Apostle when he was telling us how we should approach The Communion Table in 1 Corinthians 11:

27 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

28 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.

One phrase that stands out to me is: 'Let a man examine himself.'

Three simple steps! Step one: repent; step two: be baptised; the third step: continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

A very simple check list. Have we repented, have we been baptised, and are we continuing steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers?