

# Luke 7:1-10

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let's return now to Luke's Gospel and to chapter 7. We read together about the centurion whose servant was sick and dying and how Jesus healed that servant.

So, Luke chapter 7 and verse 3 we read that the centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.

Now, I'm really challenged by this story because it's the story of a man who amazed Jesus.

In verse 9, the man's response to Jesus amazes Jesus. When Jesus heard this, Jesus was amazed at him.

Amazed. Jesus was amazed. And that's really quite amazing to think about.

[ 1 : 14 ] That Jesus himself was amazed. He was astonished. He was filled with wonder. Why? Why? I find myself that I can pass for being a Christian.

In most company, anyway, I can pass for being a Christian. But as the story at the end of chapter 6 tells us, it's not what the edifice looks like, what the building looks like, what the house looks like. It's what the foundations are like that really counts. And the question is not what I look like. Do I look like a Christian? Because hopefully I do look like a Christian.

Hopefully, on the outside, I behave like a Christian and speak like a Christian. The question is really, what is on the inside? What are the foundations? What are the hidden things in my life? What qualities of my life that can't be seen on the surface do I have that really make me a deep and true Christian rather than just a superficial Christian?

[ 2 : 22 ] What sort of foundations do I have that will show in the crisis, in the difficult times of my life? I don't just want to be a Christian so that other people can see me in church and can see me at the youth fellowship or at the old people's group or whatever it happens to be and think, yes, he's there, she's there.

They're in the right place. They're doing the right thing. They're giving to the church. They're going to the meetings. And at home, they do the right thing. They have the worship at home and they don't swear and they don't get drunk and so on.

I don't just want to be superficially a Christian. I don't just want to have the morality of a Christian. I want to have the foundations of a Christian. I want to have a depth as a Christian.

I want that God can look into my heart and see I'm a Christian, not just people look on the superficial in my life and think that I'm a Christian.

So this man is obviously more than just a superficial man of morality. He's a man whose depths, whose foundations actually amaze Jesus.

[ 3 : 46 ] They're amazing because they're more slighting, deeper foundations than he's found anywhere else he's nuked.

And he tells us that in verse 9. I have not found such great faith even in Israel. Well, who is this centurion anyway? We don't know his name.

Like many people in the Bible, we don't know his name. But he's in Galilee. He's in Capernaum. Verse 7, verse 1 rather. He's in Capernaum. And he's a centurion.

So he's got roughly 100 soldiers under him. We believe he worked for the Herod, the puppet king of that region, Herod Antipas.

Herod Antipas was a hated ruler. He was accountable to Caesar, of course. He didn't have his own way and everything.

[ 4 : 45 ] But he used what power he had in that part of the world to acquire more and more lands, to make himself more and more wealthy, to line his own pocket, basically.

And he was a man who could do some pretty appalling things. This is the man who beheaded John the Baptist. This is the man whom Jesus calls the fox.

So the Lord has a strong aversion to this man whom the centurion serves. So it's not easy to be a centurion under Herod Antipas, to be one of Herod Antipas' leading men.

But the centurions that we meet in the New Testament almost always are men of character. There are several different centurions and almost all of them are impressive because they were chosen for their character.

They were chosen because they stood above the generality of the Roman soldiery. And this man is no exception. Although he's a man of authority, and he could therefore be ruthless and imperious, he is also a man of humanity.

[ 5 : 57 ] He's got friends. In fact, it's striking that some of his friends are Jewish friends. Verse 3, he can send elders of the Jews to Jesus.

And also in verse 6, he sends more friends to Jesus. And he loves his servant as well. Verse 2, he's highly valued by him.

So he's a man of authority, but he's humble. He's got humanity. He's got friends. And they're not just his friends because he's a powerful man.

They're his friends because he's a friendly man. Also he's a Gentile. Jesus tells us that in verse 9. He's not one of Israel. He's a Gentile. But that doesn't make him, like so many of the Roman army, were strongly anti-Jewish.

And the Jews, of course, were very, very ready to find fault with the Roman administration, the occupying power. So it's really quite remarkable that he has Jewish friends in verse 3.

[ 7 : 08 ] So he's always a man whom the Jews, the elders in the synagogue, those of integrity, actually can look up to. He's a man of honour.

A man who respects other peoples and their beliefs. He's a warm man. As in Kipling's words, All men count with him, but none too much.

He's also a wealthy man. We know this because he builds a synagogue in verse 5. He's a wealthy man, but he's not greedy. He's benevolent. He built a synagogue for the people in Capernaum, the Jews in Capernaum.

He wants to use his money to better other people's situation. We don't know what his religion was, personally, but we can see that he certainly had a great regard for Judaism, as it was in those days.

So, here's a man who's successful, he's wealthy, but he remains generous. He's got a certain background in ethnicity, but he remains understanding of all peoples.

[ 8 : 22 ] He's broad in his sympathy. He's a man of authority and position and standing, but he still remains in touch with the ordinary people and their feelings and their needs. These are good traits.

This is a good man, this centurion. And these are the sort of traits that we, ourselves, would want to have in our lives. Because even in a society which doesn't recognise Christian values particularly, and our own probably as one such now, such traits as this centurion had in his character are traits that are still valued.

And they'll still make you popular and a person of esteem and respect if you have them. They'll still make you deserving, as this man was in the eyes of the Jews in verse 4 and 5.

They'll still make you deserving in other people's eyes. Nothing about this man so far contradicts Christian faith. He's a man of charity, a man of compassion, a man of respect, a man of impartiality, a man who appears free from general vices and prejudices.

And that's what we need to be like. As Christians, we need to have that kind of good, balanced, moral character, that sort of integrity.

[ 9 : 44 ] If we don't have that, then our own Christian testimony will suffer. So far then, he's a great example to us. We'll see more about him in a minute though.

Because what happens then is that he goes to Jesus. His servant, his cherished servant, is sick and about to die. He's passed medical help.

And the centurion probably knew about Jesus before this, because the synagogue that he built, in verse 5, in Capernaum, is probably the synagogue that we read up in chapter 4, in verse 33, which Jesus was in when he cast out a demon from someone and at the same time he healed many people.

So the centurion has probably already heard of Jesus and his power and so he goes to him and he sends his friends, the elders, to him, the elders of the synagogue.

He goes to Jesus, but will Jesus go to him? See, Jesus is ministering principally to his own people.

[ 11 : 03 ] But yet we already find that Jesus has done a lot for Gentiles. Even back in chapter 6, verse 17, we read a lot of people from the coast of Tyre and Sidon where, with Jesus, Gentiles, yes, Jesus will go to this Gentile.

But why? What's his motivation? Is Jesus impressed by what the Jews think he should be impressed by in verse 4 and 5? Well, he's built a synagogue.

He's funded the building of a synagogue. So he deserves some help. Is that how Jesus goes? Does Jesus help people because they've got good character?

Because they've got lots of friends? Because they show large yes and generosity? Is that why Jesus helps people today? Does people only help those who are upright?

Only those who are generous? Well, that's not the teaching of the Bible, thankfully. He does help people like that.

[ 12 : 12 ] But he doesn't help people because they are people of standing in the community. And in the New Testament, and Luke particularly majors on this in his Gospel, Jesus helps the undeserving.

He helps those whom the Jewish elders could never have said, he deserves this, she deserves this. Those whom they just said, he doesn't deserve this, and she doesn't deserve that.

Jesus helps people even if they don't. The motivation of Jesus is really very simple. He sees a man who needs help. The man asks Jesus for help.

Jesus cares for the man and for his servant. And so he goes to help him. It's really simple. Matthew has a version of the story, an abbreviated version.

And in it, the centurion says, Lord, my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering.

[ 13 : 21 ] And it says, Jesus said to him, I will go and heal him. In other words, there's no question about our Lord. And we want to know Jesus like this.

Not as someone who only helps the deserving. Not as someone who only goes to the aid of those who are popular and respected.

But as someone who helps everyone, whatever their standing, and however undeserving, Jesus' help is always truly undeserved.

The centurion himself, of course, recognizes that. You read him in verse 6 and 7, and I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. Jesus' help is always undeserving.

Undeserved. Always merciful. Always free. And so when we are in our lives going about our business, meeting people, working alongside people, visiting our neighbors, our families, in our own minds, some people are undeserving.

[ 14 : 51 ] Perhaps in our own minds, we are undeserving ourselves. But also, let us have in our minds this, that does not rule out Jesus' help.

Jesus is willing to help all people, deserving or undeserving. Let's see our Savior like that.

Let's grasp it. There is a wideness in God's mercy, F.W. Faber wrote. Like the wideness of the sea, there is a kindness in His justice, which is more than liberty.

There is welcome for the sinner and more graces for the good. There is mercy with the Savior that is healing in His blood.

There is no place where our sorrows are more felt than in heaven. There is no place where our failings have such kind judgment given.

[ 15 : 56 ] There is plentiful redemption in the blood that has been shed. There is joy for all the members in the sorrows of the head.

Jesus for the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind and the heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind.

If our love were but more faithful, we should take Him at His word and our life would be thanksgiving for the goodness of the Lord. there is a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea for the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind.

And so in the story, why does Jesus help the centurion servant? Not as the Jewish elders think because He deserves it.

He knows Himself He doesn't. But just because there is a wideness in God's mercy. But then we come to the amazement of Jesus because we would expect perhaps this story to just kind of end with Jesus perhaps hearing the plea of this man and well he doesn't make it to the house maybe just healing him at the distance he does in other cases and that's the end of the story.

[ 17 : 32 ] But there's actually more to the character of this centurion than we've met so far that actually amazes and astonishes Jesus. And I wonder if we can truly say that we amaze Jesus or do we even amaze other people.

Has anyone ever been amazed by your depths your wisdom your love your prayer life your devotion to God your willingness to sacrifice the greatness of your giving your generosity has anyone ever been astonished at you as a Christian has anyone ever said wow I wouldn't do that that is truly amazing I never thought that Christians could show such understanding such love I never thought that Christians could cope in such situations has anyone ever amazed you?

I wonder if we ever amazed Jesus this man sees Jesus coming in verse 6 he was not far from the house it wasn't a particularly big place for Perna so the man looks out his door and he sees down the street this big crowd coming towards him with Jesus in the middle of it and he sends some friends to Jesus because he sees Jesus coming and he himself is astonished Jesus is coming to me he's coming to me he's amazed he feels he doesn't deserve that he thought maybe just Jesus would heal at a distance just hear the plea and kind of maybe send a wee handkerchief with the man to come back to lay on the man the servant who was sick or something but he's actually coming to me and he sends his friends

Lord I don't deserve to have you come under my roof I don't even consider myself worthy to come to you he feels undeserving he feels unworthy now how often do you see that trade in people who are wealthy and popular and powerful would they receive a bit more of it in the leadership of our country the general assembly this year was most impressed as I have been in the past by Lord Mackay of Clashfern a man who obviously moves in the highest circles and very much of this kind of character humility such a rare trait and it's all the more striking when you see it it's all the more amazing

I think this man perhaps must have felt well perhaps not the word he must have felt stresses working for Herod Antipas not easy to work for an evil ruler and try and keep a clean sheet yourself he must at times have felt that the murky environment he was trying to work in under this cruel leader made him responsible in some way for some of the atrocities and some of the outrageous that this Herod Antipas perpetrated and he must have been very troubled by that and conscious of how he stood before God on account of these things and that's a great thing isn't it because it humbled him it made him heal his undeserving and maybe some of you work in situations perhaps for business which doesn't have the same kind of scruples the same kind of morals that you yourself have in circumstances where you can see people compromising cheating and working in slipshod ways dishonest ways or whatever perhaps you can see that perhaps it troubles you and you struggle too with that you can understand this man's struggles and perhaps it's something then that you should use to actually help bring you closer to God to actually bring you to a place of greater humility before God because sometimes in that kind of environment we can become careless ourselves and we can let slip things that are wrong what has the position we have in the world done to our character has it made us compromisers people who can cut corners or has it made us humble people who come to God and say

[ 23 : 00 ] Lord please God help me to do the right thing here please Lord forgive me I don't think I said the right thing there please God you know I don't approve this show me what to do in this situation help me to keep right with you has it humbled you like it did with the centurion or has it pardoned you this man's humble and it's a humility which you don't really expect to find in a man in this position and it amazes Jesus but there's something that amazes him even more at the end of verse 7 the man goes on to say just say the word he says 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 when Jesus heard this he was amazed why well because this centurion has got the big picture in a way that Jesus hasn't found anyone else to help he's amazed because Jesus has been longing to find people like this centurion who can see who he Jesus is that he is under the authority of the father but that everything is under his authority and the centurion says I know what it's like for you Lord because I can see it a wee bit like that in my life I'm under Herod Antipas but I've got a hundred men under me and when Jesus says in verse 9 I tell you I've not found such great faith even in Israel he's surrounded by Israel he's surrounded by his own disciples who've had ample opportunity to get the hang of this truth and by lots of Jewish people in addition to the disciples and they must have heard verse 9's statement as a rebuke

Jesus is saying this Gentile man understands me better than all of you Jews at this time Jesus is looking for people who know what authority he has and this man understands it this man knows that if Jesus wants to heal a servant who's half a mile up the road he can do it just like that this centurion clearly sees who Jesus is his faith is staggering compared to the faith of all the others around Jesus and Jesus we read is amazed he's filled with wonder and he's delighted delighted to find someone who understands the miracle and that does challenge us today because sometimes people with faith are found in unexpected places as it is here and as it is just a few pages on with the Canaanite woman up in Phoenicia again wasn't a Gentile she was full of faith in Jesus too you know sometimes and I think it was the case with the Jews even your very religious upbringing and your morality and your uprightness can blind you to faith and just simple trust you become more trusting in your religion than in Jesus more trusting in your bible knowledge than in Jesus more trusting in your church going and the fact that you're part of this congregation and you're recognized and known as a Christian than actually in Jesus himself faith is in Jesus and that's what he's looking for he's looking for people who trust him and so we may find that faith outside of the church like Jesus does here and may be found in the most strange places there might be more faith in a prison cell in Aberdeen prison than in a pew full of presbyterians in Bonacord Free Church Jesus may be amazed by some of the people who never go to church in Aberdeen but who have just got this clear and simple understanding of who he is and trust him where he might not be at all amazed by any of us we never amaze him perhaps because we always just do the same thing and we don't we don't trust him to do the amazing in our lives so look out for it I'm sure you strive to have a good character like this centurion a moral character to cultivate a circle of friends like this centurion to be generous with your possessions and your gifts again like this centurion to be a man or woman or young person who makes no difference with people you you accept people whatever their background whatever their particular personal creeds or practices are you've got a broadness to you like this centurion but are you humble and do you have faith in Jesus do you really trust him the father's son all authority in heaven and on earth is given to me [ 29 : 45 ] Jesus says he can do anything anything at all except sin anything at all so we look at our lives today and we challenge ourselves and we say well it's not enough for me to be a person of integrity in the workplace a person people respect a person people know as moral and church going and kind and friendly and warm and broad minded and open hearted what will surprise and amaze is when they see humility and faith at work in our lives like here even the Lord himself is amazed it says at this man let's not just try and be successful and have a good circle of people around us and be known as a Christian let's seek to have the foundations of a Christian the depth of a Christian unseen depths of humility and faith a close personal relationship with Jesus things that people can't see like the fact that we bring our lives before him every day and humble ourselves before him like we really trust him and we really love him and we really are devoted to him he is everything to us let's look at the foundations as well as the edifice we'll pray together again let's bow in prayer for a moment the your way and recommendations to