



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 7:1-17

To understand more about the proper posture of faith.

Authority Above Authority

There is an old story that illustrates well the importance of recognizing where true authority lies. In the years 1014-1035, there ruled over England a Danish king named Canute. King Canute, having grown tired of hearing his retainers flatter him with extravagant praises of his greatness, power and invincibility, ordered his chair to be set down on the seashore. As he sat there in his chair on the shoreline, he commanded the waves not to come near him, nor to get him wet. Over and over again, the waves came anyway. No matter how forcefully he ordered the tide not to come in, his order was not obeyed. Soon the waves lapped around his chair. One historian records that he never wore his crown again, but instead hung it on a statue of the crucified Christ. Canute understood where true authority is found; it wasn't in himself, but Christ.

In Luke 7:1-17, Luke records, not one but, two miracles that require a kind of authority that only God possesses. In both examples, we can learn about the kind of posture of faith required of us to truly trust Jesus in all things.

The Centurion

Verse 1 begins where chapter 6 left off: "After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum." That means the Beatitudes had concluded, and Jesus left where he was and had returned back to Capernaum, where He previously had been (Lk. 4:23). Verse 2 continues by setting the stage: "Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him." A

centurion was about to lose his servant, and this set into motion the events that follow. There are a number of people who play a role in the story. Below is a brief breakdown of each of them, and what they do or say.

THE CENTURION

The chief character apart from Jesus in this story is a the centurion. He is not given a name, but his occupation sets him apart from the rest of the characters. Centurions were not simply soldiers, but commanders over one hundred men. However, he was also likely not in a military scenario because history tells us that centurions were not stationed in Galilee until at least A.D. 44. He might have been serving under Herod Antipas, who regularly used non-Jewish soldiers. This is strengthened by the fact that the centurion was a Gentile (Lk. 7:5-6; 9). He was a man who understood well authority and chain of command (Lk. 7:8).

THE SERVANT

The servant is also unnamed, but apparently well-loved by the centurion. A centurion could easily acquire another slave at any point, and so for him to seek out Jesus on behalf of this servant indicates the value and respect this servant had earned.

THE ELDERS

The request for Jesus to come and heal the servant comes from “elders of the Jews” (Lk. 7:3). They argue that because “he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue,” he is a good candidate for Jesus’ healing ministry.

THE FRIENDS

After Jesus departed with the elders to go to the centurion’s house, the centurion sent friends of his to meet Jesus outside. The centurion’s friends relay a message that indicates the level of faith the centurion possessed and the awareness he had regarding who Jesus actually is.

The centurion’s reasoning stems from his own experience. He is a “a man set under authority” and he was given charge over a number of soldiers under himself. He understands what a chain of command looks like. He knows that when someone who is in authority tells someone who is under their authority to do something, that person listens and obeys in order to respect the chain of command. In the same way that the centurion can tell underlings to go and do various tasks, Jesus can tell sickness and disease to go away and they will listen to Him because they are under His authority as the Son of God. Jesus’ response is telling: “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith” (Lk. 7:9). The centurion recognized something about the power and authority of Jesus that no one else had recognized, and it is all the more remarkable since he was a Gentile!

The Widow

After healing the centurion’s servant, Jesus traveled from Capernaum to “a town called Nain,” and He wasn’t alone; “His disciples and a great crowd went with Him” (Lk. 7:11). Apparently, as Jesus was arriving, the townspeople were carrying out the body of a man who had just died, “the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her” (Lk. 7:12). Jesus saw the woman and “He had compassion on her,” and told her not to cry (Lk. 7:13). There, in the moment, He laid His hand on the coffin and said “Young man, I say to you, arise,” and immediately the dead man sat up and began to speak (Lk. 7:14-15). The people were gripped with fear and awe, and they began to glorify God, and news of Jesus began to spread even further into “Judea and all the surrounding country” (Lk. 7:16-17).

The Underlying Current

Both of these miracles reveal a lot of important details concerning our Lord. The miracles themselves were remarkable. In the first instance, the servant was near death, and immediately was healed from a distance simply by Jesus speaking. In the second instance, the young man had actually died and Jesus brought him back to life. Beyond the clear power displayed, there is also something to be said about the compassion Jesus has for those who are marginalized. The centurion was a Roman man and thus a Gentile and an outsider to the Jewish crowd (spiritually speaking, at least), and the woman was a female *and* a widow who had lost her last line of help in her only son. One of the repeated themes throughout the three synoptic Gospels is the concern Jesus has for those who are destitute, and this theme is consistent with what Jesus Himself said He would do: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Lk. 4:18-19).

What About Now?

One application is that we should recognize the authority of Jesus and pray accordingly. Whenever someone is sick or hurting, we should acknowledge the authority Jesus has over sickness and death and make our request for healing known to God with humility and gratitude (Phil. 4:6), and accept the outcome. Just because Jesus can heal, doesn’t mean He always will. Sometimes God’s plans extend far beyond what we can understand. Our job is to ask, and the uncertainty of His response should not detour our asking. Another takeaway is the importance of compassion for destitute people. Jesus had compassion on the widow who had just lost her son; this is a tremendous example for us to follow. Compassion is an important outcropping of genuine faith in the Lord.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 7:1-3. What events does the word “after” refer to? Where did Jesus go? What was wrong with the servant of the centurion?

2. Read Luke 7:4-5. Who came to Jesus? What did they say? What was significant about this servant?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 7:6-8. Who did Jesus go with and to where did they go? Who came to greet Jesus? What message did the friends of the centurion deliver to Jesus?

2. Read Luke 7:9. What was Jesus’ reaction to the message from the centurion? What did He say concerning him?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 7:10. When the friends of the centurion returned to the centurion's house where the sick servant was being kept, what did they find?
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2. Read Luke 7:11-12. When did verse 11 take place? Where did it take place? Who was with Jesus and what did they find when they arrived in the town?
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Day Four

1. Read Luke 7:13-15. What was Jesus' response to the widow? What did He say to her and then what did He do right after? What was the result?
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2. Read Luke 7:16-17. How did the townspeople respond? What did they do? To where did news of this resurrection travel?
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Week 26 Discussion: Compassion

In Luke 7:11-17, Jesus comes across a widow who has just lost her only son, "and he had compassion on her" (Lk. 7:13). Compassion is an integral part of the Christian perspective and one that Jesus demonstrates regularly in His ministry. Talk as a group about the importance of compassion, and how you might better demonstrate to those around you who need it most.

1. Icebreaker: Would you consider yourself a compassionate person? Why or why not?
2. Who is the most compassionate person you know? Why do you feel the way you do about them?
3. What is the most compassionate thing someone has ever done for you? How did it make you feel? Did your love for God change at all as a result?
4. In your opinion, why is compassion so powerful?
5. Why do you think compassion is often disregarded in the world?
6. How can the church be more practically compassionate of people in this community?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus heals the servant of a centurion from a distance, and marvels at the centurion's faith.
2. Jesus has compassion for a widow who lost her son and raises him from the dead.
3. Jesus often demonstrates compassion on the outcast of society.