

# Jesus and His Word

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[ 0 : 00 ] Today's reading is from Luke chapter 7 verses 1 to 10. You can find that on page 1035 in the Bibles that you can find near you.

Page 1035, Luke chapter 7 verses 1 to 10. When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum.

There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was ill and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him. This man deserves to have you do this because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue. So Jesus went with them.

He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him, Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.

[ 1 : 02 ] That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me.

I tell you 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 at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.

Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, God. All right.

Good morning. Lovely to see you all. And thanks to Trevor for reading, for reading so well there.

And thanks to Martin for leading and the musicians for playing. What a joy this morning.

Let me pray for us. Oh, Father, make the book live to us. Oh, Lord, show us yourself. Show us our Savior.

[ 2 : 19 ] And make the book live to us. For Christ's sake. Amen. Well, great. As Martin has mentioned, we'll be starting a new series at St. Silas this morning entitled Jesus and His Salvation.

Looking at chapters 7 and 8 in the Gospel of Luke. And that is the salvation that Jesus alone can offer. And if you'd like to read ahead on Sundays, before Sundays, there are the readings on the card and you can just keep that at home.

And the Gospels are really eyewitness accounts of the life of Jesus written down for us so that, as Luke says, we may have certainty about the things that we have been taught.

That is, that Luke wants us to have absolute historical certainty of the events of Jesus' life and what they mean.

And so Luke sees the purpose of Jesus' coming as that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

So time and time again, we see Jesus saving people.

[ 3 : 30 ] We see Jesus in chapters 7 and 8 saving people from death, as we saw last week. And from sin, as you'll see in a couple of weeks' time. And from sickness and demons. And central to this purpose of Jesus, the saving ministry of Jesus, is the ministry of the Word.

So Luke has Jesus at the start of his ministry and time and time again as a summary of Jesus' ministry. Luke cites Jesus as saying, The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

And it's not that the poor are more deserving. No, they're less deserving. But it's because the poor, in Luke's account, are the lost. That is, they were those that were excluded from God's people.

Excluded from God's presence. And they were spiritually poor. They were spiritually bankrupt. So the good news, according to Luke, is really the story of the upside-down kingdom.

So if I was teaching this to kids, I'd have a picture of a kingdom and I'd literally turn it upside-down. Because what do we see throughout Luke's Gospel? We're seeing the high being brought low.

[ 4 : 46 ] And we see the low people being brought up. And we see this time and time again in the surprising encounters that Jesus has throughout his Gospel, throughout this Gospel of Luke.

So as we start looking at the passage this morning, let me ask you, what is it you most want? What is it you most want? Well, so recently I was listening to a TED Talk by a guy called Theo E.J. Wilson.

And I'll give you the background. The talk was entitled, A Black Man Goes Undercover in the Alt-Right. So the background to the talk was Theo E.J. Wilson was a black man living in America. And as a young man, one of his best friends had been murdered in a racially motivated hate crime by white supremacists, by the alt-right, as it were.

And in working through the emotional fallout from this, Wilson thought that he needed to understand where these people were coming from. So what he did was, as you do in the modern day, was he set up an internet profile as a white supremacist alt-right member with anti-black sentiments entitled Lucius 25.

[ 6 : 01 ] And so what he did was he joined chat rooms, he joined Facebook groups, and he'd listen to the vitriol and the arguments coming against black people throughout these chat rooms.

And he found that he was surprised. He was surprised by something. He was surprised at one clear point that came out time and time and time again throughout these chats.

And so he comments, one theme kept screaming at me through the subtext of these arguments.

And that was, why should I be hated for who I cannot help but be?

Now, as a black man in America, that resonated with me. I felt unexpected compassion.

Wow. And maybe this is something that we can empathize with here at St. Silas this morning.

Wanting to be accepted for who we are without having to apologize.

[ 7 : 01 ] That's unconditional acceptance. But I wonder if you can also empathize with something else. So if you're anything like me. And that is, you want unconditional acceptance on the one hand, but you also find yourself rebelling inwardly and being passive-aggressive to others.

So let me put it this way. We crave the community of others, but we also want to live above the law without reference to others.

Doing everything and having everything our own way. So here's the theologian Michael Horton in his book called Ordinary, Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World.

He gives us, he goes on and he says, Over a decade ago, David Brooks identified the boomer generation, that's those born post-war up until 1965, as, it's not a flattering title, Bobos in Paradise. That is, on the one hand, they demand autonomy, resisting settled beliefs, norms, and values. They want to do it and have it all their own way. But on the other hand, they crave community and belonging.

[ 8 : 14 ] And you cannot have it both ways, though. Belonging to a community requires individuals to live within a certain level of mutual accountability.

And if you're feeling younger, don't think you're off the hook. Horton goes on to say pretty much the same thing about those born post-65. And the problem is really, is a similar problem that's faced by Eustace in Sirius Lewis's book, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader.

So I'll just remind you, Eustace is the no-at-all self-interested cousin who's forever trying to shirk off and get out of work and labor. The cousins of the heroes in the book, that's Edmund and Lucy.

And he's always looking out for number one. And so the scene is, Eustace wanders off away from a work party to shirk out of work as it is.

And he discovers a giant dragon's hoard of treasure. And he accidentally turns into a dragon. So C.S. Lewis writes, Eustace had turned into a dragon while asleep.

[ 9 : 19 ] Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself. His first feeling was one of relief. There was nothing to be afraid of anymore.

He was a terror himself. And nothing in the world but a knight. And not all of those would dare attack him. He could get even with Caspian and Edmund now.

But the moment he thought this, he realized he didn't want to. He wanted to be friends. He wanted to get back among the humans and talk and laugh and share things. He realized that he was a monster cut off from the whole human race.

An appalling loneliness came over him. And he began to see that the others had really not been the fiends at all. And he began to wonder himself if he had been such a nice person as he had always supposed.

And when the thought of this poor dragon, at the thought of this, the poor dragon that had been used, lifted up its voice and wept. A powerful dragon crying its eyes out on the moon in a deserted valley.

[10:25] There's a sight and sound hardly to be imagined. And that's the problem with being a dragon, isn't it? You have all the wealth, autonomy, independence, power and authority that you could ever want or ever dream of, but no one to share it with.

And this is not a new problem, is it? Is it? This has been a problem since the Garden of Eden. Again, we crave belonging, acceptance, community, intimacy, but at the same time, we demand autonomy and independence.

And in our pride, we endeavor to be radical and relevant, to make a name for ourselves, setting ourselves up as mini-gods and rejecting God's authority over us.

And in doing so, we reject God and his word, his ordinary but very extraordinary way of ruling his creation.

And so what is the problem with this? Well, the issue is that the proclaiming of his word through the power of the Spirit is God's means of saving the lost and building his new community.

[11:46] So as we look at our passage today, we'll consider firstly, what are the marks of the person that's going to be part of God's new community? Then we're going to consider how you can be in this community, how you can be accepted by God.

And finally, we're going to consider why it is that you are accepted by God. So firstly, what are the marks of the person in God's new community? And the first thing that we notice is a new acceptance.

So I wonder if you'll look down and consider the first thing about the centurion in our passage today, that he has a new acceptance.

So let's look at verse 1 in our reading. When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum.

There, a centurion. And what are the things that Jesus had been saying, all those things? Well, there. There are all the teachings that we love about Jesus.

[12:48] That's his Sermon on the Plain, Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount. But they're the Beatitudes, to love our enemies, not to judge others.

That a tree is recognized by its fruit. To be a wise builder, coming to Jesus, hearing God's word, and putting God's word into practice.

And it's not that these are things that describe lots and lots of different people, that these are all things that describe one person, the man or woman of God, who has been accepted into God's new community.

So no sooner has Luke recorded these things than he introduces their centurion. So Luke's told us the theory, and now he's going to show us what the theory looks like in practice.

And at this point, you might expect Luke to introduce someone who's, well, more respectable.

Perhaps a lawyer, doctor, engineer, maybe a vicar, someone like Martin, perhaps.

[13:54] But Luke, surprisingly, introduces someone who's quite literally been in the trenches, tent trenches. And that is a Roman Gentile.

This is someone who's outside of God's people. Someone who is spiritually poor and lost. You see, the Romans were the enemies of the Jews.

The Romans, at the end of Luke's gospel, would go on to crucify Jesus. But to a degree, the Jewish elders recognize that this Roman centurion is accepted by God and is a man of God.

And so they came to Jesus. And in verse 4 and 5 we read, They pleaded earnestly with him, This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation, and he has built our synagogue.

But notice, their acceptance is conditional. Yes, he's a Roman. Yes, he's one of them. But this one's different. He's a good guy.

[15:01] He's not like those others. He's one of us. But the acceptance and belonging that Jesus promises and is going to give the centurion is so much bigger.

It's unconditional. And so Jesus goes with them. The second thing we notice about the centurion is that he's marked by a new humility.

So rather than making appeals to Jesus on the basis of the things that he has done, as the Jewish elders do, he in fact boasts exactly the opposite.

So look down at the second half of verse 6 and verse 7. So rather than boasting in his own merits, he is marked by a new humility.

He acknowledges his spiritual poverty. And well, the final thing that we notice about the centurion is that he accepts a new authority.

[16:12] So look at the centurion's very first word to Jesus in verse 6. Lord. Now consider the radical nature of the statement.

Here we've got a Roman centurion. He's devoted to worship to the emperor under pain of death.

He's a hardened commander of men. He's been sent to what is a hard province to govern.

So think of Maximus out of the movie *Gladiator* if you've seen it. And he's calling an impoverished, itinerant Jewish preacher from Nowheresville, Galilee, Lord.

And in particular, what it is that he notices, he recognizes the authority of Jesus' word. So look down at the second half of verse 7 and verse 8.

And this is really the heart of this passage. It says, Well, one of my lecturers at college, he has a rather obstinate little five-year-old boy now who's built like a brick, basically.

[17:33] And often Chris would have to say to him, Ben, don't do that. And you could literally, quite literally, so Ben, don't throw something at your sister.

And you could quite literally, you'd watch Ben, and you'd see the clocks ticking in his mind like this, going, well, I could do this, but that guy only speaks once.

What he says, he does. So if I disregard what dad says, I am disrespecting dad. And the point is, Jesus is inseparable from his word.

His words are his actions in the world. What he says is who he is, and how he acts in the world.

Well, you see, ultimately, God's word is a preposition. I'm sorry to take you back to grammar school, but it's a preposition. See, you can sideline it.

[18:34] You can put it to one side. You pay it, lip service. It's important. God's word's important. We're all about the word. But the worries of life and some new fad is going to distract us from sticking with the word.

Or we could put ourselves over it, that's above it, and treat it suspiciously, reading it critically. Oh, well, that clearly never happened.

This view's rather unpopular. It's outdated. We've moved beyond that now. How interesting, how quaint, that the Bible says this. And in effect, we never let God disagree with us.

And we make God into our very own image, fallen and foolish and limited, rather than seeing God as the infinite, absolute creator God that he is.

Or we can sit under God's word, seeing God's word as his perfect word, spoken to his creatures through human authors, as his means of salvation for them.

[19:46] So in taking Jesus' words as authoritative, the centurion becomes the model of the person of God, the wise builder, who comes to Jesus, hears his words, and puts them into practice.

And so Jesus, who welcomes the man into his new community, welcomes him unconditionally. So look at verses 9 and 10. When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him.

And turning to the crowd following him, he said, I tell you, I have not found such great faith, even in Israel. When the men who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

So the people who find themselves in Jesus' new community are people marked by a radical new acceptance. They're marked by a new humility.

And they are people with a new authority, Jesus and his word. So moving on. How then can you be accepted by God and welcomed into this new community?

[20:54] So as human beings, we crave community, unconditional acceptance for who we are without apology. But here is our problem.

It's not that our thoughts are too big when we think about community, but they are too small. You see, God's acceptance is greater and more imaginable, unimaginable, than we could ever imagine.

So here's Wilson again, Theo Wilson, on having compassion for white supremacists. Now mind you, I don't have enough compassion like I want to be friends.

I don't have infinite olive branches to extend to people who'd want to not see me on this planet.

See, Wilson's compassion is conditional.

But Jesus' new community is more welcoming and more radical and more inclusive than we could ever build or imagine. His is a community where the most unlikely are accepted with open arms.

[ 21 : 58 ] His is a community where Jesus has compassion on a widow and saves her son. Where he saves the servants of his enemies.

Where your and my sins that we're so ashamed of that destroys community are wiped clean and utterly forgotten. Where acceptance is not on the basis of what you have done in your fallenness and your creatureliness but on what he has done in his infinite perfection and where in the future there'll be no heartache, no tears or pain.

And the way into this community is not by ritual or deserving deeds as the Jews understood it or by pursuing the novel or trying to be progressive or radical, trying to build community and ironically rejecting God along the way.

The way into this community to gain a new acceptance is humility. To humble ourselves under God's word.

You see, the word is God's means of building unity and community. What destroys community? What's going to destroy unity? Well, it's rejecting and sidelining God's word as set out in the Bible.

[ 23 : 23 ] And we do this in our pride when we make ourselves big. But to abandon God's word is to abandon God. But what builds community and gives unity when we accept God's word and listen to it out of humility?

So, we've considered what are the marks of the person who's in God's community? We've considered how to get into God's new community. Let's now consider how you are accepted into God's new community.

How it is that you can be accepted by God. Now, some of you at this point might say, well, James, be realistic. Aren't you being a bit strong?

What's all this business about humility and obedience? But here is the thing. Ultimately, in the saving of the widow's son that we saw last week and the saving of the centurion's servants, there are two pictures of absolute helplessness.

You see, the centurion for all his power and good deeds and wealth and the widow in her poverty and destitution were absolutely helpless and hopeless before King Jesus.

[ 24 : 41 ] They were entirely dependent on Jesus. Only Jesus had power over death. Only Jesus could give the salvation they so desperately needed.

they needed Jesus' mercy and grace. You see, Jesus died on the cross for them that they may be accepted and that they may be welcomed into God's new community.

And the New Testament describes us as being dead. Being dead in our sins and transgressions. That is the wrong things that we've done and our attitude that has been against God in wanting autonomy and independence and rebellion and passive aggressiveness.

See, we might be rich, we might be poor, we might have lived what we think is a morally respectable life or been a rich, got a good degree, running a good business, a community person, but we are all hopeless and helpless before King Jesus and we are totally dependent on His mercy. See, only Jesus has power over sin and death. Only King Jesus can give us the salvation that we so desperately need. Jesus died on the cross for you so that you could be welcomed into His kingdom.

[ 26 : 11 ] I want them, I want you, and I will die for you on the cross. I want you in my new community. That is what Jesus has done.

That you may be in His new community. So in conclusion, what about you? Maybe you're sitting here today and you need to come under the authority of God's word for the first time.

God is more accepting than you could ever know or imagine. There's nothing that you have ever done that could separate you from God's welcome, from God's love for you when you trust and believe in Jesus revealed through God's word.

If that is you today, come speak to Martin, come speak to myself, come speak to, maybe go speak to a friend who you know is trusting Jesus and tell them that. Speak to them about what it is to be in Jesus' new community and to be following God.

Maybe you have sidelined God and you've sidelined His word. Perhaps, perhaps unintentionally, the business of life has simply crowded it out.

[ 27 : 27 ] Busy job, busy family, busy social life, busy endeavors, busy projects to be worked on. And so the word has subtly slipped out.

Well, turn back. Or, you've intentionally, you've moved on from God's word, His ordinary but extraordinary ways of revealing Himself.

And you've sought the new and the radical. Well, turn back to God. Turn back to reading and believing and trusting in God's word. Seeking to understand it, to groan it, to know it, to love it. And then finally, maybe you are sitting here today as someone who's been sitting over God's word. You may be seen as too old-fashioned, too fuddy-duddy, unfashionable.

Some of the views are unpalatable. It's not progressive enough. Perhaps, you need to turn to God in humility, trusting in His word.

[ 28 : 28 ] I'm not saying abandon reason, but rather, read the Bible as God's word. God who is infinite, absolute, and our creator spoken to a hopeless and helpless people.

Well, let me pray for us. Father, we thank you for your word and we thank you for this model of the centurion, someone who is lost, who is far away, but who is now in.

Help us to model him, Father. Help us to be humble. Help us to accept you and trust you and take you at your word. Please work within us this week to be more obedient and diligent in listening to you and obeying you.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.