

Luke 7:1-23 // Young man, I say to you, get up!

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much, Isabel, for leading us in our prayers. If we've not met before, I'm Martin Ayers, the lead pastor here. And shortly we're going to have our Bible reading, and then we're going to be looking at that together.

It's on page 1035 in the Church Bibles. It's Luke chapter 7. We've been in this series in Luke's Gospel. That's our regular diet as a church, is to work through books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, so that God sets the agenda.

And sometimes when we're reading a Gospel, I think for someone who's already a believer in Jesus, we can be thinking, what's the application here? What does this do in my life?

But we wouldn't be thinking that if we've been here the last couple of weeks in Luke chapter 6, because we've heard Jesus set out his plan for his people in Luke chapter 6, how he calls everyone who has experienced his kingdom life to now live.

He finished it with a parable at the end of Luke chapter 6 about building firm foundations for your life, being a wise builder, by putting his words into practice in your life.

[1 : 0 8] Not just being a hearer of Jesus' words, but being a doer of his word. But when we look at his words, they are words that call us, if we follow him, to live in a way that we might find completely upside down.

He says, the good life, the blessed life, is one where you belong to Jesus, even if you are what the world would see as a failure.

You are poor, you are weak, you are suffering. He says, when people say all kinds of things about you that are horrible, because they know you follow Jesus, leap for joy, he says, because of the privilege of belonging to his kingdom and the wonderful future that he promises and assures you is coming.

So, he says, when people make themselves your enemies, instead of harming them, love them, pray for them, bless them, give to them.

And he says, just like a good tree bears good fruit, make your heart like a treasure chest where you spend your life storing up treasure about him, about Jesus, so that it bears fruit in your life.

[2 : 3 2] And we're listening to him and we might think, this is crazy. This is too costly for me. It is too much. And if we're thinking like that, the issue really is, do we trust Jesus?

Do we really trust him as a person so that we can really trust his words? That's the question that paves the way for our next scenes and Ennis is going to come and read them for us now from Luke chapter 7.

Let me pray before we does that. Heavenly Father, we praise you that we are here today with Bibles freely available in language we can understand so that we can hear you speak to us.

And we ask that your spirit will be at work so that every one of us, wherever we stand with you today, has an encounter with you as your word is proclaimed.

May you open our eyes to see Jesus. May you open our minds to understand. And may you open our hearts to respond rightly to him.

[3 : 42] For we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Luke chapter 7, verses 1 to 23.

When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion 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. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word and my servant will be healed.

[4 : 58] 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 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. Soon afterwards, Jesus went to a town called Nine, and his disciples in a large crowd went along with him.

As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.

When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her, and he said, don't cry. Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still.

[6 : 03] He said, young man, I say to you, get up. The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God.

A great prophet has appeared among us, they said. God has come to help his people. This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea, and the surrounding country.

John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?

When the men came to Jesus, they said, John the Baptist sent us to ask you, are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else? At that very time, Jesus cured many who had diseases, illnesses, and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind.

So he replied to the messengers, go back and report to John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.

[7 : 21] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So in the first scene this morning, Jesus himself is amazed in verse 9.

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.

So that Luke is recording for us an amazing miracle here, but the spotlight is actually on the centurion, on the soldier, because here is a model for us of how to approach Jesus.

Our first point is on the sheets, if you find that helpful, a centurion who models amazing faith. So in chapter 6, we were on this high as Jesus set out his great vision for his people and how we are to live his kingdom life.

But in verse 2, we come crashing down to earth with all its irresolvable pain. Verse 2, there a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.

[8 : 32] So a centurion was in charge of a hundred soldiers. They were important men. They were very well-paid men, rich men, big houses, placed by the Roman Empire to guard their occupied lands.

And I've put three points about him on the sheet that we can learn from. The first is, he's a strong man who knows that he's not powerful enough. He shows us that you can have a big job, a successful career, huge worldly influence, and things will still come into your life that you can't control and you can't fix.

In verse 2, this servant is special to him. He's held in high esteem. Maybe because the centurion is a good man and so he has great personal affection for the people who work for him.

A servant like this one who is respected, who is loved, but he's sick. He's at death's door. And there is nothing that this centurion's money and power can do to fix that.

And maybe as we think of him, you can think of somebody you know who's gone through something like this, that someone they love is sick and about to die and you've seen the helplessness that they feel, the pain, the fear, the anxiety, the sorrow.

[9 : 59] Much of the time, lots of us live in this world in denial that these moments will come to us. I worked in a law firm that was a world of fit and healthy people working long hours with lots of energy.

It seemed like no one ever got sick. And Simon, one of the senior partners in my department, retired in his 50s and he was the picture of success.

Charismatic, competent, very rich. It looked as though he'd played all his cards right. and within weeks of his retirement due, he was diagnosed with aggressive terminal cancer.

And it sent this shockwave through the lawyers in my department. As you could see, people just grappling with the realisation that everything we were working for, the portfolio of clients, the pension investments, the private healthcare, none of that helps you in a crisis like the one that had hit Simon.

We are profoundly insecure because we live in a broken world and people we love have mortal bodies and they get sick. But because this centurion realises that he is powerless, he reaches out to Jesus.

[11 : 23] In verse 3, he's a Gentile, he's not a Jewish man, he's outside the people of God, so he sends Jewish elders to ask if Jesus will come to help, to heal his servant.

And sometimes we hear people get cynical, don't we, about someone coming to Jesus because they're in crisis in their life. We come across stories where you have people who are apparently successful and then their world collapses and they become Christians.

And people look on at that and they say, oh, that's because Christianity is a kind of crutch for the weak. So because they were weak people, they ran to Jesus.

But actually, sometimes a crisis in life of suffering, of sickness, of grief, is the crucial wake-up call that we need, waking us up from the myth that we've been living with, that we've got life all sorted, that it's all under our control.

the next thing we see modeled so well by this commanding officer is he is a good man who knows he's not worthy enough. And the Jewish leaders get this wrong.

[12 : 39] They think that they need to impress Jesus by the man's good character to get him to come. Do you see that verse 4? 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. Now the Jewish elders there, they believe what every human religion will tell you.

Isn't that what most of us were told growing up? Isn't it? If you are good, then God will be pleased with you. Good people, they go to heaven. If you do good things, you'll get blessing and favor from God.

So these Jewish leaders are saying, Jesus, come with us to help this man. He is a good man. man, he is not like the other centurions around him. Some of them are really hard work.

They are really nasty. They are brutal. But this one, compared with them, he deserves a good break from you, Jesus. I mean, when we were building the synagogue a few years ago, he did a sponsored marathon for us.

[13 : 43] He raised the money so that we could get it built. You have got to help him. But the centurion, the outsider, he knows better in verse 6. Jesus 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.

That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word and my servant will be healed.

how has the centurion got to this insight? It might be because he's heard something of Jesus' teaching and it's convicted him in his heart that he thinks, well, the Jewish elders are right, that if you rank all the centurions for good behavior from here to here, I'm probably pretty near the top.

But when I've heard Jesus teaching about how good you have to be for God, the standard isn't somewhere around here. The standard is in the sky and I'm not worthy. It might be that he's seen something of Jesus' character.

The synagogue that he helped build in Capernaum is the one that in chapter four Jesus was in when he announced his mission. As he read from the prophet Isaiah and he said that the promised spirit filled rescuing king of the Old Testament, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

[15 : 12] So maybe the man had seen something of Jesus and he realized, if you hold my life up against the sheer goodness and beauty that I've seen in that man Jesus, his moral perfection, his courage and gentleness, his wisdom, his joy, his righteousness and mercy, I fall very far short of where I would need to be to be worthy.

So he is like Simon Peter. We saw a couple of chapters ago when he met Jesus in the boat, in the fishing boat and realized what he was seeing, he fell on his knees and said, depart from me Lord for I'm a sinful man.

And Jesus had to say don't be afraid. The man knows he's not strong enough to fix this. He knows he's not good enough to go it alone.

And those are really crucial realizations for any of us today. So long as you think that you're strong and you think you've got your life under control, you won't come to Jesus because you won't think you need him.

So long as you think that you're good, that if there is a God up there, he is pleased with me because I do better than other people, well you won't come to Jesus because you won't think you need him.

[16 : 34] But church is a community of people who've realized they do need help because this world is profoundly messed up and that affects our lives. And they've realized I'm not good enough for God.

And they've realized the third thing that we see in this man, that when it comes to Jesus, the centurion is an important man who knows authority when he sees it.

So look again at the end of verse 7. He says, well he sends the emissaries to say to Jesus, but say the word 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.

One thing that I love preparing this this week is how in this scene Jesus hasn't even said anything yet. And yet the whole focus of the scene is the power of his words.

[17 : 34] You see what the centurion is saying? If you just speak Jesus, my servant will get healed. You don't even need to be there. I get it about you. And the centurion explains it brilliantly then with this picture in verse 8.

You see the picture he says there are 100 soldiers in Israel who live and work at my beck and call. I am king in their world. If I say march up that hill, they go up the hill.

They don't ask why, they do it. But the centurion has realized as he's heard of Jesus, as he's seen Jesus, with Jesus, when he speaks, evil spirits have to submit to his will and release people.

Physical bodies heal. Paralyzed people can suddenly walk. The wind and the waves calm down. And he thinks, the authority that I have over those hundred men, Jesus has over the whole world.

So Jesus, you just need to say the word and my servant will get better. And his faith in Jesus turns his life around. Verse 10, then the men who had been sent returned to their house and found the servant well.

[18 : 50] So what a meeting that must have been. As they came back into the centurion's courtyard, heading into the big house, thinking, have we got the message right from Jesus?

And they arrive and it's all fixed. They can celebrate because the servant who was heading into the jaws of death, the power of Jesus' word, from a distance, just pulled him out again, snatched him free.

But what about when the jaws of death have already closed on somebody? That's our second encounter with Jesus today. Our second point, we meet a widow who suffers awful grief.

Jesus travels on to this town called Nain and a large crowd are with him. The crowd that are with him are probably on cracking form. We've seen that one thing that's offending the religious leaders about Jesus is the atmosphere of celebration around him.

And he likened it to be, it's like a wedding when Jesus is there. And he is like the bridegroom has finally arrived. But in verse 12, they bump into another large crowd and the moods of the two crowds could not be more different.

[20 : 00] Verse 12, as he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out. The only son of his mother. And she was a widow.

And a large crowd from the town was with her. So Jesus now faces up to our greatest enemy. We were seeing last Sunday evening at evening church that in Hebrews 2, it says that humanity lives our whole life in captivity to the fear of death.

And we see that in people around us who decide you've just got to pack as much great stuff into your life every single day because you don't know what's around the corner. We're captive to that sense that our days are numbered.

And some of you will be young enough that you haven't yet seen the reality that others of us will be experiencing of the poem that's found on a wall of a cathedral in England.

When as a child I laughed and wept, time crept. When as a youth I dreamt and talked, time walked. When I became a full-grown man, time ran. When older still I daily grew, time flew.

[21 : 10] Soon I shall find in traveling on, time gone. And the Bible affirms for us that it is right for us that we have this sense that death is not natural to us.

As humans we were made in the image of God. We were made with eternity in our hearts. We were made for relationships that endure forever. And so death is a cruel enemy because it breaks those relationships, doesn't it?

It takes people we love and it separates them off from us. And today for some of you, I know this is very painful because you are experiencing right now seasons of grief.

But these things show us that all of us need a worldview that can give us an answer to death. A good friend of mine, Billy, married Kate when we were in our twenties and Kate was a high flyer.

She used to brief Tony Blair when he was Prime Minister, week by week before Prime Minister's questions. She was an extraordinarily successful, competent woman. She ran an NGO helping governments in developing nations.

[22 : 20] She was given an OBE. Her and Billy had twin boys and then she was diagnosed with terminal cancer. And she died when she was 36 on Christmas Day.

And she wrote a number one bestseller before she died. It's called Late Fragments. She said this in the book. She said, I would do anything not to be writing this book.

My cancer has taken from me the future I had planned for myself. A career doing good things, travelling the world, being important and successful on the terms I had long set myself.

It's stolen the take it for granted ease from my relationship with Billy. We should be bickering about who takes the bins out, not having heart to heart about how I want our children to be raised.

It's taken away my ability to be the mother I want to be. Every hug is now charged with the electric joy at their being there and the misery that I won't see their future. It goes on like that.

[23 : 20] It is a beautiful book but it is a horrible book because death is such a horrible thing. Well Jesus meets this woman who has experienced the death of her husband and now all too soon she is grief stricken again.

And in the musical Hamilton that's coming to Glasgow this month, when Hamilton loses his son, the song that gets sung says this, there are moments that words don't reach.

There is suffering too terrible to name. He is working through the unimaginable. Well picture this grieving woman accompanied by mourners, the lifeless body of her son carried out on the funeral bier to his burial place.

And on the day that Jesus approaches Nain, I think to that point in human history, there have only ever been three people brought back from death to life.

And they were all in the time of Elijah and Elisha, great prophets who came to God's people about 600 BC. And at that time, we heard the first one from 1 Kings 17 in our Old Testament reading.

[24 : 35] Elijah strikingly raised a widow's only son to life. And when Elijah did it, he stretched himself out on the dead boy three times. And he cried out to the Lord in prayer.

And the Lord heard his prayer. And the boy's life returned. And perhaps every mother in Israel since that day who'd lost a son would have thought to herself, if only it was the days of Elijah.

If only Elijah was here now. Maybe he could have fixed this. So we come to our third point, a saviour who demonstrates awesome authority.

We hear his motivation in verse 13. Have a look at that. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her. Well, folks, that is a precious truth, isn't it?

That this is what the God who is there is really like. He is the Lord. He's in charge of everything. And when he sees people enduring sadness, his heart goes out to them.

[25 : 43] And then he speaks astonishing words. He said to the woman, don't cry. Well, at that moment, in front of that great crowd, is that not the most audacious thing he could have said?

But after speaking to her, Jesus speaks to her son. And you can see the rich eyewitness details in Luke's account, verse 14.

Then Jesus went up and touched the beer. They were carrying him on. And the bearers stood still. There's a stillness.

And Jesus says, young man, I say to you, get up. Now, when I was 20, away at university, my sister phoned me one Saturday night.

She said, have you got people with you to help you? Because I've got terrible news. Our cousin Simon had been run over and killed. He was 13 years old.

[26 : 44] And I tell you what, at the funeral, looking across at my aunt Susan, I wish I was able to say, Simon, get up. I wish I could have said that and brought him back.

If only someone could have said that. So then look here at verse 15. The dead man sat up and began to talk. And then Jesus takes the young man and he gives him back to his mother, once dead, now alive.

What a wonderful moment. A moment of great supernatural power directed towards compassion and love. And so we understand the reaction in verse 16.

They were all filled with awe and praised God. A great prophet has appeared among us, they said. God has come to help his people.

And the news spread about Jesus throughout Judea and the surrounding country. Far and wide. And so all around Jesus now, people are working out who they think he is.

[27 : 50] That's our fourth point. We've got the witnesses piecing it all together, scene by scene. More witnesses come in the next scene. John the Baptist is in prison and he sends people to say to Jesus, are you the one who was to come?

Now what he means by that is the one God had promised. The world is a mess, isn't it? But the prophets of the Old Testament promise God is going to put the whole thing right.

He's going to make it all good one day. And God promised that he would do it through a chosen one, a spirit-filled servant king who will come and make everything good one day.

And so John the Baptist is saying to his followers, can you go and find out is Jesus the one? And Jesus sends them back in verse 22 saying go back and tell him what you're seeing.

All the signs that Isaiah said you would see in the promised one. Piece it all together. And for the crowd you can see why they say in verse 16, surely a great prophet has appeared among us because it's the memory of Elijah to them.

[28 : 59] But when they stop and think it's a bit different to Elijah, isn't it? That's why we had it read. Elijah really had to exert himself, didn't he? He laid on the boy three times.

Jesus just speaks. And with Elijah there was this earnest prayer, calling out to God. But again, Jesus doesn't have to pray.

The authority is in him. The one Elijah had to call on to give life to a widow's son, well now he's here in the flesh. And the miracles are to help you and me piece it together.

To grasp this and to have confidence in this man's word. That's what happens with Elijah. When Elijah gave the alive again son back to his mother, she didn't say, now Elijah, my heart is full.

Or, now Elijah, my grief is gone. she says, now I know. Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.

[30 : 12] Now the crowds are able to look at Jesus and say, now we know. Now we know this man's word is the truth. And it shows us what real faith is like.

We've had our example from the centurion of what it looks like to approach God, to approach Jesus, humility and trust. But faith is not a leap in the dark about Jesus.

Faith is about piecing together the evidence about him. Who else could he be? The crowds can do that now. They can think, if this man by his own authority can get rid of suffering and even get rid of death, then he can fix everything.

It means he really is the promised one, God's chosen one, come to fix this broken world. And you might think, well he came and it's not fixed.

Well it's not fixed because he's not finished. But he has got started and people all over the world are coming to him in humility and faith and finding restoration now and hope for what he will do in the future.

[31 : 23] So as we bring things back to our own lives, let me ask you, who are you turning to to sort out the things you're really worried about this week and in life and in death?

Is it yourself? Are you backing yourself? Is it a parent that you form when things really go wrong? Is it your partner? Who are you banking on to sort things out?

Let's remember what the centurion teaches us today about authority. If you were one of his 100 soldiers, if anything at all crops up, what do you do?

Where do you go to? You go to him, right? Your centurion. He is king in your world. If you're worried about something, you go and tell him. He is in command.

Well, if Jesus is king of everything in the world, what do we do? If anything crops up, what do you do if there's something you're worried about this week?

[32 : 29] If you're in this world, put your life in the hands of this man. What's cropped up for you in your life? Put your trust in him.

How do I know I can trust him? Look what he did. Look what he did. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we praise you for your mighty power, your unfailing compassion, your redeeming love.

We set our hope upon you today. Thank you for your promises that you will return and finish what you started. When we see your compassion for that grieving widow, we see we can trust your character.

And we look forward to that day when there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. Thank you that you've demonstrated you can bring that day by the power of your word and your indestructible life.

so may each one of us take you at your word for our lives that by your spirit we will live out your commands and would our transformed lives open doors of opportunity for us to share God's word about you with many that they would find in you a great saviour for your name's sake.

[34 : 06] Amen. Amen.