

## “Compassion in Action”

November 3, 2019

Luke 7:1-17

### I. Introduction

In the Sermon on the Mount that Luke summarized in [Luke 6](#), Jesus had taught that those who were to be His followers needed to recognize that they were sinners and that there is nothing they could do to save themselves from an eternity in hell, instead they needed to trust God for their salvation. Paul summarized the same thoughts in several verses in the Book of Roman: for example, in [Romans 3:23](#) he wrote that “**All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;**” in [Romans 6:23](#) he wrote that “**the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord;**” finally, [Romans 10:9](#) says “**If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**”

But Jesus didn’t stop there. There are expectations of those who make Jesus their Lord and Savior—Jesus has expectations of those who are Christians. Jesus said that Christians are to rejoice when they are hated, excluded, insulted and rejected by the world. More than that, He said that Christians are to “**love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you**” ([Luke 6:27-28](#)). These are high standards which are impossible in one’s own strength, but [Philippians 4:13](#) says, “**I can do all this through him who gives me strength.**”

After finishing His teaching session, Jesus then took His disciples on a field trip to demonstrate these thoughts in action as well as demonstrating His compassion for others through His healing power. It all began when Jesus returned to his adopted hometown and headquarters of Capernaum and the request from a centurion...the amazing centurion.

### II. The Amazing Centurion & a Dying Slave

**A. The Scene** As a centurion, this man was an officer over 100 men in the Roman army. He was, also, a Gentile, or, maybe, a Samaritan in command of part of an occupying army. But there was one thing in his favor, like most of the centurions we meet in the New Testament, he was a man of great faith. Everything that Jesus said earlier about the characteristics of a true disciple were characteristics of this man.

There was something else very special about this centurion—his attitude towards his servant. The average slave owner of the day had no more regard for his slave than for an animal. The Greek philosopher Aristotle said there could be no friendship and no justice toward inanimate things, not even toward a horse, an ox, or a slave, because master and slave were considered to have nothing in common. “*A slave,*” he said, “*is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.*” But this centurion from Capernaum had a deep compassion for his slave who “**was sick and about to die.**” Luke didn’t describe the disease or symptoms, but Matthew noted in his account in [Matthew 8:6](#) that the servant was “**paralyzed and in terrible suffering.**”

Because Jesus was very well-known in the area (Luke 4:14, 37), the centurion had heard about Him. And through his investigations, the centurion had heard more than just the superficial talk about Jesus' miracles—he had learned enough about Jesus to recognize who Jesus really was. Believing that he was not worthy to go to Jesus personally, in humility, the centurion “sent some elders of the Jews to him, i.e., to Jesus, asking him to come and heal his servant.”

Jews and Gentiles usually hated and despised each other. As a rule, the Jewish elders had no love for the Roman occupiers in general and the Roman soldiers in particular, but, yet, the elders came to Jesus and “they pleaded earnestly with him, ‘This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.’” This centurion had overcome the many prejudices, had recognized the Jews as God's chosen people, and loved them. He showed this love by building the Jews in Capernaum a synagogue.

The main function of the synagogue was to teach the Word of God, and by building the synagogue, the centurion showed his love for the truth—the Truth of God. Like Cornelius, the centurion in Acts 10:1-2, this centurion was a true God-fearer. Somehow through the teachings in the synagogue and the evidence concerning Jesus of Nazareth, this centurion had believed the truth that Jesus Christ was the Promised Messiah, Savior, and Lord.

**B. The Centurion's 2<sup>nd</sup> Message** Jesus knew the man's heart “so Jesus went with” the elders; a large crowd of people, who were eager to see yet another miracle, followed. When they were “not far from the house,” the centurion sent word for the Lord to come no closer. Unlike the proud, self-righteous Jewish elders, he was too ashamed of himself and his sinfulness to be in Jesus' presence—this is being “poor in spirit.” His attitude was like that of Peter who exclaimed in Luke 5:8, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” and the tax collector who “would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner’” (Luke 18:13).

The centurion sent a second group, this time one consisting of “his friends to say to him: ‘Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.’” The centurion recognized his sinfulness and Jesus' holiness and hadn't yet experienced His grace and mercy. All he knew was that he was not worthy for the Lord to come under his roof. It was because of his sense of sinfulness and unworthiness that he “did not even consider myself himself worthy to come to” Jesus in the first place.

Instead of having Jesus enter his house, the centurion proposed that Jesus just “say the word, and my servant will be healed.” The centurion saw a parallel between the way he commanded his soldiers and the way Jesus commanded diseases. He understood Jesus' authority as God and knew that if He just said the word, the healing would occur.

**C. Jesus' Response** “When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him.” Jesus was amazed at the man’s humility and faith. The centurion understood that God owed him nothing. He didn’t even feel worthy of being visited by the Son of God. But at the same time, he understood Jesus’ compassion and authority to heal. He believed that Jesus could heal by a simple word even at a distance. And he knew that Jesus cared enough to do so.

Hearing the centurion’s words, Jesus turned “to the crowd following him, he said, ‘I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.’” On the one hand, Jesus was affirming the centurion’s great faith. But, sadly, on the other hand, the reality that not even in all of Israel could the same faith be found. Matthew closed his account by writing, “And his servant was healed at that very hour” (Matthew 8:13).

### III. Jesus’ Power over Death

**A. The Scene** Following Jesus’ compassion for the centurion and his servant, Luke wrote of Jesus’ compassion for a destitute widow: “Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain.” Nain was a tiny village about 20 miles southwest of Capernaum and 6 miles southeast of Nazareth. Along with “His disciples and a large crowd,” Jesus made the full day’s journey from Capernaum to this tiny village—God had a plan.

In God’s timing, Jesus and His followers arrived at the gate just as “a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.” Since Jews buried their dead the same day of the death, it is likely that Jesus and His disciples arrived at the city gate late in the afternoon of the day the boy died. As a widow, the death of her only son was the end of her last means of support. She was in dire straits. Seeing the sad, chaotic scene and knowing the situation, “when the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her.” The merciful, loving Son of God had compassion for this devastated woman and said to her, “Don’t cry.”

**B. Jesus’ Compassion** “Then he went up and touched the coffin.” According to Numbers 19:11, touching the coffin makes a person ceremonially unclean, but, in this case, it also demonstrated Jesus’ compassion for the widow. Normally, trying to halt a funeral procession and touching the coffin or corpse would have produced outrage and the person who did so might even have been attacked by the angry mourners. But because of the Lord’s commanding and confident presence, “those carrying it, i.e., the coffin, stood still.”

Demonstrating His power over death, Jesus simply told the corpse to “get up!” The dead man—actually the formerly dead man—“sat up and began to talk.” In contrast to Elijah who stretched over a dead body 3 times (1 Kings 17:21), and Elisha, who touched a dead child with a staff held over him to raise the dead (2 Kings 4:31-35), Jesus simply said a word. The young man was immediately restored to full strength and “Jesus gave him back to his mother.”

**C. The Response** Needless to say, the raising of the dead man brought an abrupt and shocking end to the funeral. The people were filled with awe and fear and “they praised God.” But they missed the point that God was actually present in the person of Jesus Christ. To them, Jesus was nothing more than “a great prophet” who “has appeared among us.” I suspect they thought Jesus was a prophet like Elijah and Elisha. They missed the point that unlike the other resurrections which were done after much prayer to God, this resurrection was through Jesus’ own power. Turn to John 1:1-5, 10-13. Sadly, “the world did not recognize Him.”

#### IV. Conclusion

The humility of the centurion had allowed others, like the Jewish elders, to honor him as a worthy man—1 Peter 2:12 says, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” But the central lesson of the centurion story is the nature of the man’s faith. If this Roman with very little spiritual instruction, had the kind of faith in God’s Word and power that we see in Luke, how much greater should our faith be? We have an entire Bible to read and study, as well as nearly 2,000 years of church history to encourage us and yet we suffer from too little faith. Our prayer should be that of the disciples in Luke 17:5, “Lord, increase our faith!”

Thinking of the centurion, “How do you come to Christ?” 1) Do you come with confidence of His love and compassion for you? John 3:16 says the God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son to die for you. God truly loves you. 2) Do you come with a reverent spirit to Him or is He just the “Big Guy up there”? Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” We must not drag God down to our level. It would be good if we could see ourselves as God sees us. 3) Do you come with humility asking only that God’s will be done? That’s what we pray every Sunday as we recite the Lord’s Prayer together—“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Do you mean it? 4) Do you come in faith believing in God’s power? In Luke 17:6 Jesus said, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.” Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” How do you come to Jesus? Do you come with confidence, reverence, humility and faith?

But remember, coming with confidence, reverence, humility and faith doesn’t mean that you will always get the “healing” or the “thing” you want. Paul had absolute faith in God’s ability to heal him; he had personally experienced it—e.g. he had been left dead after being stoned but was healed (Acts 14:19-20). He was, also, used as the instrument of God’s miraculous healing to others. But when he prayed 3 times for his

own “thorn in the flesh” to be removed, the Lord’s answer was, “No.” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). We need to remember that in Isaiah 55:8 the Lord said, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” We can be sure that because of His love for His children, God’s answer will be the best one possible. But it may not be what we expect. We just need to “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5-6). Come in humility and faith.