

## Luke 7:1 – 17

<sup>7:1</sup> When he had completed all his discourse in the hearing of the people, he went to Capernaum. <sup>2</sup> And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. <sup>3</sup> When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking him to come and save the life of his slave. <sup>4</sup> When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored him, saying, 'He is worthy for you to grant this to him; <sup>5</sup> for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue.' <sup>6</sup> Now Jesus started on his way with them; and when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, 'Lord, do not trouble yourself further, for I am not worthy for you to come under my roof; <sup>7</sup> for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup> For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it.' <sup>9</sup> Now when Jesus heard this, he marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following him, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith. <sup>10</sup> When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health. <sup>11</sup> Soon afterwards he went to a city called Nain; and his disciples were going along with him, accompanied by a large crowd. <sup>12</sup> Now as he approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. <sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, he felt compassion for her, and said to her, 'Do not weep.' <sup>14</sup> And he came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise!' <sup>15</sup> The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. <sup>16</sup> Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, 'A great prophet has arisen among us!' and, 'God has visited His people!' <sup>17</sup> This report concerning him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.

### Historical and Cultural Background

- *Roman centurions* were typically despised, because Rome occupied Israel, but this one was well regarded.
- *Coffins* were considered unclean by Jews because of their association with death. Jesus did something very unusual by touching one.

## Questions: The Centurion and His Servant

### 1. The centurion and his dilemma

- a. If your cousin was dying, and you wanted to go ask Jesus to heal him, how would you ask? (Often: 'I would go myself and ask him to come to my house, so that if it doesn't work, he could try again!') How does the centurion ask? Why? So what's going on? What strikes you as interesting?
- b. Who might the slave be? Perhaps an elderly person that is a tutor to the centurion's children, perhaps a trusted household servant of some sort.
- c. How is this centurion probably feeling at the start of the story?
- d. Why does the centurion search for Jesus? He has heard that Jesus is clearly powerful.
- e. Why might he send Jewish elders first? Perhaps because he thinks that the elders can tell Jesus what to do. After all, they're older than him! Maybe the centurion knows how to work the chain of command. He is, after all, a military man.
- f. Maybe the centurion's worldview is like this: Rome on top; Israel on the bottom. Rome's gods on top; Israel's God on the bottom. His own power on top; the Jewish elders sandwiched in the middle; Jesus on the bottom.

### 2. The Jewish elders

- a. What do you think about the Jewish elders' line of reasoning with Jesus? They emphasize his worthiness, but what is worthiness? It's almost as if they're saying he's as close to being Jewish as you can get, because he loves the nation and helped build the synagogue. But he's not Jewish after all, is he? How confident are the elders that Jesus will come? Probably not 100%.
- b. What major barrier do the elders think they need to overcome? Jewish hatred of Romans, especially centurions. Maybe Jesus shares that hatred, they think.
- c. When Jesus turns to go to the centurion's house, would the disciples and the crowds have been surprised? (how would the disciples have felt?) Maybe a little, that he would go to a Roman's house. After all, Romans are the enemies of Israel. But on the other hand, the centurion had been good to Israel. So probably mixed.

### 3. The friends

- a. Why does the centurion send another delegation, this time of friends? Maybe because he knows how the Jewish elders would reason on the basis of his worthiness, and is uncomfortable with that. He doesn't want to make Jesus feel like he can use authority on him! The centurion also knows he's unworthy because he's one of the enemy. Maybe because he is respectful of Jewish scruples about a Jew stepping into a Roman's house (it may have been seen as unclean); he doesn't want to make Jesus uncomfortable, though Jesus would have probably come in anyway.

### 4. The centurion – reflecting on him again

- a. What do you think of the difference in the two appeals, the appeals of the Jewish elders and the centurion's closer friends? If you had to choose one, which one would you send?
- b. So why did the centurion send the Jewish elders at all? Probably to respect Jewish customs, and honor Jesus. (It's important to see the social dilemma the centurion is in.) He wanted to work through the proper channels to send the message to Jesus that he honors the role of Israel in God's plan.
- c. Why does the centurion have a high regard for Jesus' verbal authority? His military background.
- d. What does a military man do when he is given a command? He takes it seriously, because he is under authority. But he knows that he is also given power and authorization to do the task. He is authorized to do it. Likewise the centurion knows Jesus can just command something and it will happen. This is just like God in Genesis 1; what God says happens, happens just as he says.
- e. That's why it's important to note the remark in v.8, 'I *too* am a man under authority.' He recognizes that Jesus is under God's authority.
- f. **IMPORTANT SHIFT:** Usually we see a person in authority as 'someone who can tell me what to do.' The centurion experiences Jesus' authority not just as that, but also as someone whose word is so powerful, it gives us power to carry it out.
- g. **NOTE:** In 7:1, the discourse Luke is referring to is the Sermon on the Plain (Lk.6:20ff.). Hence, just before these stories, Jesus emphasizes the importance of his word. By his word, he calls us to be transformed people, to be his new community, to be people who love so much they love people who really annoy them, to be people who show mercy and not judgment, and to be people whose lives are built not on themselves but on his word. Jesus calls us to be totally un-self-centered. For

most of us, that's hard! For us, the question is, 'How can I live like that? It takes supernatural power to be that kind of person!' Here Jesus demonstrates the power of his word. Jesus doesn't just define his vision for our lives; he gives us the power to live it out. When we take Jesus' word seriously, there is power in that word to transform us. If the centurion had been in the crowd, he might have said, 'Wow, that's hard stuff. But if you say that I can live this way, then your word must have power for me.' STATE STRONGLY: Sometimes we feel that authority figures in general just 'tell us what to do' and then stand back to watch. But Jesus gives us the power to live it out. This is an extremely high view of Jesus' authority.

- h. What early indications did this centurion give of faith in Israel's God? He had Jewish elders as friends. He helped build the synagogue in Capernaum. His respect and appreciation is sincere.
  - i. Therefore, what is the centurion's worldview? Israel on top; Rome on the bottom. Israel's God on top; Rome's gods on the bottom. Jesus on top; the Jewish elders sandwiched in the middle; his own power on the bottom. This is incredible!
5. So Jesus praises the centurion's faith. The centurion had never seen Jesus, and yet still trust the power of his word. What about us? Do we ever see Jesus? Or do we just have to trust the power of his word? What does that mean for you?

#### Questions: The Widow and Her Son

1. The widow's powerlessness
  - a. How important was the son to the widow? How much did the widow depend on her only son? A lot. Henceforth the widow is without resources. She is helpless.
  - b. Name what the son means to the widow? Strength, life, sustenance, hope for the future, the center of her life.
  - c. Did the center of your life (or dreams, or hopes, or source of strength) ever collapse or die? Or what would it be like if it did?
2. Jesus and the touch
  - a. If you were a Jewish onlooker, how would you feel about Jesus touching the coffin? Surprised – it's an unclean thing, and it would make him unclean to touch that.
  - b. Where else have we seen Jesus touch an unclean thing or person? The leper in Lk.5:13: And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.'
  - c. What about the centurion's house? Was it unclean for a Jew to go to a Gentile's house? That was the popular opinion. Notice in Acts 10:28, Peter says, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him.' So Jesus didn't get the chance to encounter an unclean thing with the centurion. It's as though he goes out of his way to touch the coffin of the dead son.
  - d. Notice how the widow story intensifies the centurion story? The son to the widow is even more important than the slave is to the centurion. The son is dead whereas the slave was on the verge of death. And Jesus didn't get to go into the unclean house, but here he touches the unclean coffin. What does that tell you about Jesus' compassion and power?
  - e. Why do you think Jesus goes out of his way to touch unclean things? Not just 'to dispel the myths' as if uncleanness wasn't real. It was real to the Jews. It was to show his power over the Law that defined uncleanness. And also to foreshadow the time when he will take on all of the uncleanness of the world onto himself, and not just touch it, but become it and have it overwhelm him: the Cross.
  - f. What's surprising about this miracle? Jesus doesn't even ask for faith – he is simply compassionate. Jesus touches the coffin when he doesn't need to. Jesus stops his crowd of disciples, which is probably jubilant, to go to the widow's crowd, which is mourning.
3. The widow restored
  - a. How did the son feel towards Jesus? Was the son devoted to Jesus henceforth? Probably.
  - b. Was the widow devoted to Jesus henceforth? Probably.
  - c. So the widow's strength, life, and hope were now reoriented around Jesus. What does that mean for her? Does she get the same son back? Or a different son?
4. In what sense does Jesus give you your strength, life, and hope for your future?
5. In what sense does Jesus reorient and redefine your strength, life, and hope?

#### Questions for both the Centurion and the Widow

1. So what might be the possible reasons these two incidents are put together?
2. Are there limitations on who can approach Jesus? No. In these back to back stories, a Gentile and a Jew are honored. That signifies all humanity.
3. How does Jesus heal the centurion's slave and the widow's son? By his word
4. How bad of a condition was the centurion's slave in? S/he was almost dead.
5. How bad of a condition was the widow's son in? He was dead.
6. What forces do Jesus confront in both stories? **Death.** It's almost as if Jesus didn't get a chance to fully demonstrate his power over death in v.1-11, so he raises the widow's son from death as the very next thing he does. Also, **Uncleanness.** It's almost as if Jesus didn't get the chance to touch or penetrate the uncleanness issue in the centurion's house, so he deliberately touches the coffin.
7. The son to the widow is even more important than the slave is to the centurion. What does that tell you about Jesus' compassion? It intensifies as we see his power intensify.

<b>Centurion</b>	<b>Widow</b>
Man	Woman
Gentile (Roman)	Jewish
Losing a slave	Lost a son
Slave is on the verge of death	Son is already dead
His loss is significant	Her loss is more significant
He asks for Jesus	Jesus comes to her
Jesus doesn't get to enter his house, an unclean place	Jesus does touch the coffin, an unclean thing
Jesus heals from a distance	Jesus heals from up close
Jesus heals by his word	Jesus heals by his word
Jesus shows his power to avert death	Jesus shows his power over death