

INTRODUCTION:

We all have lots of things that depend on us. You may have children or grandchildren that depend on you. You may have a business that depends on you to keep things running smoothly. Or you may have a loved one who needs your constant care and attention.

These are not necessarily problems in it of themselves. It is just part of being human and having responsibility. The problem is that we can start to believe that everything depends on us. We can believe that God depends on us. We can start to think that maybe God's work in the world is dependent on us to. That if we don't do something, if we don't act a certain way, if we don't have enough faith, then the Kingdom of God may suffer.

The reality is that God does not depend on us but we need to depend on Him. This morning we are going to look at two stories in Luke 7:1-17. And these stories are meant to show us that God's work and the miracles of Jesus do not depend on us but depend on our gracious Savior.

If you are carrying a heavy burden this morning, I hope that careful study of this passage will lift your burden and lift your eyes to Jesus.

Point 1: **Jesus's work doesn't depend on our worthiness (v. 1-10)**

I think we can get distracted by making this passage all about the authority of Jesus.

After all every single miracle that Jesus works reveals His authority. He has authority over sickness, and demons, and even death itself. He has authority and power over the winds and the waves over Angels and Demons.

I don't think our first story about the Centurion and his servant is about Jesus's authority, but about the man's faith.

Let's take a look at the story.

Verse 1, **"After He had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum."**

Jesus finishes teaching his sermon on the plain.
He leaves the mountain and leaves the plain and he enters the city of Capernaum to continue his kingdom work.

The people of Capernaum have been hearing about Jesus.
They've been hearing about his miracles and they've been hearing his teaching.
And now someone responds.

Verse 2, **"Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him."**

A centurion is an officer in the Roman army.
He would have been respected and had power and influence.
And one of his servants in his household is sick and dying.

It also mentions that the servant **"was highly valued by him."**
this doesn't mean that he was a really expensive slave.
It doesn't mean that it would have been costly to have to replace him.
Luke later uses this word in chapter 14 to describe the honored guest at a feast.
it is not a value of money but a value of honor.
This is someone who the Centurion cares about deeply.

Verse 3, **"When the Centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant."**

The Centurion has heard about Jesus.
But instead of going to Jesus himself, he sends others.
They go as his representatives.

Because the Centurion is a gentile.
He is not a Jew.
He is not a member of the nation of Israel.
And so he goes to the Jewish leaders in his city.
He asks them to intercede on his behalf as his mediators.

You only need a mediator when there is a disparity between people's social standing.

If you are going to talk to a high ranking elected official or celebrity, then you would need someone who could go between you.

It is remarkable that the Centurion seeks mediators.

He is the one with high social standing.

He is a Roman citizen and officer.

Jesus is from nowhere Nazareth and is a homeless, wandering teacher.

Yet, the Centurion believes Jesus ranks above him.

Right from the beginning we should see what this says about his faith.

Verse 4, **"And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him,"**

We shouldn't rush pass this fact.

It is unheard of and unusual.

Gentiles and Jews hated each other.

The Jews hated their Roman oppressors.

They would have especially hated Roman soldiers.

The fact that the elders do this for the Centurion,

Should tell us something about the character of the Centurion.

Jewish religious leaders are happy to do a Roman Gentile soldier a favor.

He must be a man of impeccable character.

They don't just do it because they owe him a favor.

They are happy to do so **"Earnestly"**

And he seems to be a righteous man.

Which is why the elders tell Jesus, **"He is worthy to have you do this for him."**

They believe that the Centurion is worthy of a miracle.

If you like marking up your Bible, then you might want to circle or underline the phrase **"he is worthy."**

Because this passage hinges on it.

And we are going to come back to it.

They believe the Centurion is worthy.
He is worthy of God to answer his prayers.
He is worthy to have his servants healed.
He is worthy of Jesus' time.

Everyone is crowding around Jesus.
Everyone wants to spend some time with the Rabbi.
Everyone wants Jesus to heal their afflictions or help their family.
Everyone wants to ask Jesus their questions
Everyone wants just a moment of Jesus' time.

These elders are trying to tell Jesus the Centurion is worthy of His time.
If anyone should get special treatment today it should be him.

Why would they say this?

Verse 5, **"for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue."**

They bring out the Centurion's resume.
They read his bonafides.
They list some of his righteous actions.

You can tell there is a reason the Centurion asked them.
They seem like great people to have as a reference for you.

They list two particular reasons why they believe he is worthy.
First, **"for he loves our nation."**
Even though the Centurion is a gentile, he loves God's people.
Even though he is not a part of them.
Even though he could never be a full citizen of Israel, he cares for them.

Not just does he have sympathy.
Not just does he root for them in some sporting events.
He has love in his heart for them.

And his love is tangible.

It has been expressed in ways that the Jewish leaders have no problem vouching for it.

He does not rule and lord over him with his soldiers as someone trying to crush and destroy Israel.

He lords over them as one who loves them.

The second reason is **"and he is the one who built us our synagogue."**

The Centurion has built them a place of worship.

He cares not just for their national pride.

He seems to care for their spiritual practice.

He is given credit for building them a synagogue.

He paid for it.

He used his influence to help it get built.

He probably uses his influence even now to protect it.

This Centurion builds not a Roman temple, but a Jewish synagogue.

And the Jews are happy to have it.

They are pleased that a Gentile helped them worship.

Now we don't know if the Centurion worshipped there.

We don't get lots of details about his faith.

But, no one builds temples, or houses of worship for gods that they are not at least interested in.

At the very least he is a spiritual seeker who believes there is something to the Jewish God.

He is willing to spend his money, influence, and reputation for YWH.

He seems like someone who is worthy.

He has greatly blessed Israel and is deserving of God's blessing.

The Jewish elders are appealing to the Abrahamic covenant.

God made promises to Abraham in the book of Genesis that God would bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.

This means that if anyone blesses the nation of Israel,
Then God will bless them.

And if anyone curses or opposes Israel, then God will respond in kind.
The Centurion has blessed Israel so as a result he should be blessed.
The elders are not just making a personal recommendation, but a theological one.

After hearing their report, Jesus goes with them.

Verse 6, **"And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof."**

Before Jesus even gets to the house he is interrupted.

Someone else comes to stop him.

The Centurion sends some of his friends to tell Jesus He doesn't need to **"trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof."**

The Centurion does not want Jesus to take any more of Jesus' time.
And he says something else.

"I am not worthy."

I told you to mark it before.

I would mark it again.

In my Bible, I underlined both and drew a line between them.

The Centurion does not believe that he is worthy.

This is helpful for us to see why the Centurion stops Jesus from coming inside.

He is not being rude or disrespectful.

He is not trying to keep Jesus at bay because he doesn't like him.

He does so because he acknowledges that he is not worthy.

Verse 7, **"Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed."**

He says that this is why he didn't come himself.

He doesn't believe he is worthy to be in Christ's presence.
He doesn't believe he is worthy to have Christ in his home.
He just wants Jesus to give the command and heal his servant.

He does not appeal to his righteousness.
He does not tell Jesus his resume.
He does not tell Jesus he deserves to have his prayers answered.
He does not tell Jesus about all he has done for Israel.
He doesn't tell Jesus how he is not like the other gentiles.
He doesn't remind Jesus of the synagogue he has built.

When he looks at his actions he does not feel worthy.
He recognizes the truth of his spiritual condition.

Verse 8 he gives the reason he dares ask Jesus.
Not because of his works, but because of his faith.

Verse 8, **"For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."**

He recognizes his own authority and power.
The Centurion commands somewhere around 100 soldiers.
And that doesn't count his servants or his household.
After all, this whole story has been people going this way and that at the Centurion's command.
We have not, and will not hear a single word from his mouth.
We will only hear his words through his servants.
And he does not say this to boast.
He does not say this as if to say that He and Jesus are just like each other.

The Centurion says this to say, "If I have authority, how much more authority must you have."
"If I have power, how much more power do you have."
The Centurion has faith.

He believes about Jesus what the Pharisees and religious leaders so far have misunderstood.

Jesus really is God.

Jesus really has power of heal with just a word.

He doesn't even need to be in the same room.

Verse 9, **"When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."**

Jesus is amazed at the man's faith.

This doesn't mean that Jesus is surprised.

Jesus knows everything.

Jesus is standing there proud.

He is enjoying the beauty of the man's faith.

Like a parenting watching their child do a trick they have already seen.

Watching again marveling in love.

Jesus praises the man saying **"Not even in Israel have I found such faith."**

Jesus says the Centurion's faith is greater than any Jew.

Greater than any priest.

Greater than any Scribe of Pharisee.

Greater than any of His disciples.

A Gentile has the greatest faith.

Verse 10, **"And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well."**

The friends return to the house and see the servant healed.

Notice again the Centurion does not say a word.

We don't see his perspective at all.

The Centurion probably saw the servant healed at the moment Jesus gave the command.

Just as he believed Jesus would.

Jesus works this miracle not to merely to show his authority.
We already know that Jesus can heal the sick.
We already know that Jesus can heal the sick with a mere word.
Jesus heals to show us what brings His work.

It is not our worthiness.
The Centurion doesn't see this miracle because of how much money he has donated to Jewish causes.
He does not see miracles because of his name on a building.
He sees a miracle because of his faith.

So, it is with us.
We can be tempted to believe that our works and righteousness are what make us worthy.
We can believe that our reputation with others makes us worthy.
We can believe that being religious makes us worthy of Jesus doing things on our behalf.
I have been tempted to believe all my degrees and effort makes me worthy of God doing great things on my behalf.
But God doesn't work miracles for the most worthy, but for those with faith

But you cannot buy your way into salvation.
You could build a thousand churches on every continent.
You could give billions to the poor.
You could eradicate all sickness with your genius.
But none of that will bring you salvation.

Salvation only comes through faith.
Without faith our greatest works are filthy rags.
They are empty actions.
They can be covert-narcissism disguised as altruism like some kind of congressmen.¹

¹ To paraphrase the theologian Taylor Swift in her song "Anti-Hero"

[transition] First we see Jesus work a miracle for someone with great faith. Next we are going to see God work a miracle for someone with no faith.

Point number 2: Jesus' work doesn't depend on our faith (v. 11-17).

One reason we are not looking at each story individually in Luke is because you need to see them together.

If you look at these stories separately, then you miss the connection.

You might miss why Luke placed them here.

And Luke tells us this story so that we can see Jesus does not only work miracles because of our faith.

Sometimes Jesus does so out of compassion.

Verse 11, **"Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him."**

After leaving the city of Capernaum, Jesus comes to a small place.

All of His disciples are following Him.

A great crowd is still coming along behind Him.

As Jesus gets close to the town something approaches.

Verse 12, **"As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her."**

There is a funeral procession.

A widow's only son has died.

Much of the town seems to be a part of this funeral.

We don't know why.

But they are probably there because it is a tragedy.

It is being led by a widow and her only son has died.

She has no other children to care for her.

She has no other family to watch over her.

She has not husband to provide for her.

She is all alone.

It is not just that all her family is now dead.
Her whole life is now over.
She will have no one.
She is in an incredibly dangerous place financially.
She probably won't be able to provide for herself.

The crowd that is there knows this.
And so they come and mourn with her.
Much like any small community when tragedy strikes.
Like when a family dies in a crash, or a small child is murdered.
Communities may all go to the funeral to mourn in support.

Verse 13, **"And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."**

Jesus sees all of this.
Jesus sees the funeral goes by.
He hears the tears of the widow.
It is probably much more than a little weeping.
I imaging it was moaning or loud wails of anguish.

But Jesus sees her.
Jesus noticed not the crowd.
He pays particular attention to this one woman.
He sees her plight and her struggle.
And **"He had compassion on her."**

Jesus cared about her struggle.
Jesus cared about her grief.
Jesus cared about what she was facing now and what she would face.
And Jesus shows compassion.

What does compassion mean?
Does it mean that Jesus just felt bad for her?

Does it mean that Jesus turned to His disciples and said "that poor thing?"

No.

Luke uses the word for compassion three times.

The first is here in Luke 7:13.

The other describes the good Samaritan who sees the man beaten by robbers and left for dead in Luke 10:33

The Samaritan has compassion for him.

The Samaritan's compassion is active and leads to saving him.

The other time is in Luke 15:20 in the parable of the prodigal son.

It describes the father who has compassion for his prodigal son.

And even though he son is a long way off.

Even though he has taken his money and wasted it.

The father has compassion and runs out to see him.

So, Jesus has compassion.

And Jesus' compassion is going to lead to something miraculous.

Jesus tells her, **"Do not weep."**

Last week we what Jesus said about those who weep.

Luke 6:21, **"Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh."**

The widow is weeping now, but she is about to be blessed.

She is mourning now, but she is about to laugh for joy.

Two times in the gospel of Luke Jesus will tell someone not to weep.

Both times are at a funeral.

Both times result in resurrection.

Jesus does not call us to stop our weeping by ourselves.

He does not expect us to swallow the tears and figure it out.

He does not make us do it alone.

Jesus tells us not to weep, because resurrection is coming.

Verse 14, **"Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."**

The bier is the open casket.

Jesus interrupts the funeral procession.

And the pallbearers stand still.

As Theologian and Pastor Charlie Dates says, "Jesus never delivered a eulogy because every time he showed up to a funeral, there was a resurrection."²

And Jesus is at a funeral now.

And there will be a resurrection.

And Jesus says, **"Young man, I say to you, arise."**

Jesus says, let there be life.

Jesus says, death you won't win today.

The voice that spoke the world into existence, speaks life again.

Verse 15, **"And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother."**

The man immediately sits up and starts talking to Jesus.

I can't help but wonder what he said.

But Jesus just takes him by the hand and points him to his mother.

Verse 16, **"Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"**

You can understand why they would all react this way.

The crowd was in the midst of grief.

They all knew the man was dead.

But Jesus just brought him back to life.

² He said it in a sermon I listened to, but I cannot remember which one.

They can't help but glorify God.
They are amazed and out of their minds, as they should be.
Jesus has just brought someone back to life.
This is the first time we see Jesus defeat death in Luke.
But it will not be the last.
It is only a warm up.
We are still at the beginning of the story.

The crowd rightly recognizes that **"God has visited his people."**
They mean that God has shown up and worked a miracle.
They are trying to communicate that God has done something wonderful.

But they do not realize that God has visited them.
This is the day that God came to the town of Nain.
Because Jesus is truly God.
Jesus is a great prophet.
He is not great just because of His miracles.
Jesus is a great prophet because He is God.
And He is a God who brings the dead back to life.

Verse 17, **"And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country."**

Word of Jesus keeps spreading.
Because how could it not?
How could you not tell people about the man who brings the dead back to life?

But as we look at this story, do you see what is different?
Do you notice the differences between this one and the Centurion?
Who had faith in this story?
Who asked Jesus to heal?
Who asked Jesus to bring the man back to life?

The Centurion was important and well known.
The widow is a nobody.
The Centurion had the greatest faith in Israel.
The widow didn't even see Jesus.
The Centurion asked for a miracle.
The widow just wept.

Yet both saw miracles.
And the widow even saw the greater one.
This is remarkable.
This puts some holes in the prosperity gospel.
There are television charlatans who will tell you that your faith brings miracles.
They will tell you that if you only have faith without doubting, then God can do great things on your behalf.
If you would just believe, then God could even raise the dead.

In this room we might all say that we reject the prosperity gospel.
But the problem is that it infects us.
We often believe parts of it even just subconsciously.
We can believe that if we just had more faith,
 then God might answer our prayer requests.
We believe that if we were more faithful in our Bible reading,
 Then maybe our lives wouldn't be so difficult right now.

But that isn't what happens in this story.
Nobody has faith here.
But Jesus brings resurrection.
No one believes, but Jesus acts.
No one even prays, but Jesus shows compassion.

It is a reminder that God's work doesn't depend on us.
The greatest miracles of God are not dependent on your faith.
They are not dependent on how much you pray.

They are not dependent on how much Bible you know.
They are not dependent on how good your theology is.
They are not dependent on your obedience.
Instead, they are dependent on the compassion of our Savior.

And this is wonderful news.
This is why the gospel is such good news.
Because our Savior is compassionate towards sinners.
We still need faith. We are saved by faith alone.
But this is a reminder He is compassionate towards those with weak faith.
Jesus is compassionate towards us.
And we are saved not but the quality of our faith, but the quality of our Savior.

Ultimately every work of God is an act of compassion.
Our faith does not command Jesus.
Our faith is not a magic word that bends God to our will.
God acts in His own sovereignty.

After all why did Jesus come to die on the cross?
Did He come because of the greatness of our faith?
Did He come because we asked Him to?
Or did Jesus come out of compassion?
Did Jesus come to bring resurrection when all hope seemed lost?

And Jesus brings the dead to life.
Plenty of places in Scripture remind us that we are saved by God's grace.
That we were all dead in our sins until God has compassion on us.
He saw our sad estate.
He saw our tears and our sorrow.
And Jesus adopted us.
Jesus didn't die on the cross because His disciples had such great faith.
Jesus wasn't resurrected because His followers believed in Him.
Jesus did His work out of His grace and compassion for us.

CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] Jesus' work doesn't depend on our worthiness or our faith, but on the compassion of a gracious Savior.
2. [Challenge] As you go through your week, do not believe that everything depends on you. Depend on God instead. You do not have to be worthy enough. You don't even have to have great faith. But you do need to have the right Savior.