**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**COMING TO JESUS**

**Luke 7:1-17**

**INTRODUCTION**

Please open your Bibles to Luke 7. Today we continue our series in the Gospel of Luke called “Finding Certainty in a World of Doubt.”

This weekend people around the country are celebrating Canada’s 150th birthday. I think many of us would say that we are proud to be Canadians. Although we’re seeing a lot of moral decline across the country, Canada is a great place to live, at least when compared to most of the other places in the world. We live in relative peace, both within our borders and without. We enjoy economic prosperity. We’re really good at hockey. We may not boast about ourselves a lot, but we are deeply proud to be Canadian.

As proud as we may be, our national pride doesn’t hold a candle to the pride certain people have regarding their own countries. We don’t have the same history, or the same shared sense of identity, that other countries tend to have. This is largely because we are such a young country. We may be 150 years old, but there are some people groups around the world that have been around for millennia.

In our text today, we’re going to encounter the national pride of one of the most ancient people in the history of the world: the Jews. If anyone has a rich history, it’s the nation of Israel. Israel’s pride as the people of God was one of the things that made them hate Jesus so much. Jesus was a Jew himself, but he declared that God’s plan of salvation involved more than the Jewish people. God’s plan would extend across racial barriers and reach people of every nation.

Today, we’re going to read about a group of Jewish elders who are going to try to recruit Jesus to help a non-Jewish soldier, not because they cared much about God’s plan to save people outside of Israel, but because they cared about Israel. They want Jesus to show kindness to this Gentile because he had shown kindness to them. In other words, the kindness of the Jewish elders towards the Gentile is rooted in their national pride. In their view, God’s universal plan to save people from every tribe, nation, and tongue was dependent on how those people treated the Jewish people.

As we have seen so often, Jesus rarely does what those around him expect to do. He responds to the request from the Jewish elders, but not for the reasons they think. Jesus isn’t going to help this Gentile soldier because he has been kind to Israel. He’s going to help him because of his humble faith in Jesus. Jesus shows us that God’s mercy comes not to those who respond well to Israel, but to those who respond well to Jesus.

The title of this message is **Coming to Jesus**. My aim today is to show you that **Faithful Obedience Starts with Humble Faith**. We will have three points today:

1. Come to Jesus with Humility
2. Come to Jesus with Faith
3. Come to Jesus with Assurance

(1) **COME TO JESUS WITH HUMILITY**

Luke begins Chapter 7 by connecting what he’s going to write with what he had just written in Chapter 6 with the way he transitions between the two chapters in verse 1: “After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.” You may recall what was said at the end of Chapter 6. Jesus said that, among those who hear him, there are two kinds of people: those who only hear his words, and those who hear and obey his words. Those who only hear are like people who have built their house on sand. At the first sign of adversity, the house is going to topple over. Those who hear and obey are like people who have built their house on rock. No matter how hard the trials of life may be, they shall stand strong.

Now, what Luke writes in Chapter 7 is going to tell us how we start becoming the kinds of people who build their lives on a foundation of rock. Our text today is like the first building block in the foundation of a life lived in obedience to Jesus. If we want to become the strong house that does not fall over, we need to start by applying the lessons we find in Chapter 7.

To show us what this first building block is, Luke turns to an unlikely source: a Roman centurion. The Roman army was famous for its excellence in battle. It was highly trained and disciplined, largely because of the leaders who were put over the soldiers. A centurion was ranked between a Decurion, who commanded ten soldiers, and a chiliarch, who commanded one thousand soldiers. Centurions themselves commanded one hundred soldiers. They were responsible for maintaining the discipline, training, and morale of the soldiers put under their authority.

Centurions were essential to the maintenance of the Roman legions, and as a result, they were well compensated. The lowest paid soldier earned 75 denarii, which was the equivalent of about $15,000 today. In contrast, a centurion would make between 3,750 and 7,500 denarii, which would have been between $750,000 and $1.5 million today. In summary, centurions were very wealthy and highly respected, part of the social elites of Roman society.

This would have been true of the centurion we meet in Luke 7, but Luke shows us that there’s more to this centurion than we might assume. Verses 2-3 say that the “centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.”

Typically when we read about people bringing the sick to Jesus, they’re bringing family members. People would reserve this request for the people they loved most in life, because they would likely only encounter Jesus once in life and have one opportunity to benefit from his miraculous power. This centurion, with his one opportunity, chose to bring his servant. The Greek word here for servant is actually “bondservant”, which was a type of slave. They weren’t necessarily mistreated like modern slaves, but they also wouldn’t have been treated like family.

This centurion was different. He valued his servant so highly that he wanted Jesus to heal him. His request took planning. He knew that Jews weren’t supposed to associate with Gentiles, so he recruited Jews to approach Jesus on his behalf. More than that, he recruited Jewish elders, leaders of the community who would hopefully hold more influence over Jesus. This was a carefully thought out plan, and it was all done out of his love for his servant. All this seems to tell us that the centurion was a kind man, a man who cared about people regardless of their social status.

But his kindness to his servant isn’t the reason why the Jewish elders thought Jesus should heal his servant. They believed that Jesus should heal him because of his kindness to the Jewish people. Look at verses 4-5: “And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, ‘He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.’”

We’ve already talked about the centurion’s yearly salary, and now we see that one of the ways he chose to spend his money was by building a Jewish synagogue in Capernaum. Why would he do that?

It wasn’t uncommon for Gentiles to become Jewish converts. Such people were called “proselytes”, and they were considered to be a part of God’s covenant people. This centurion didn’t seem to be a proselyte for a couple reasons. The first reason is that, when the Jewish elders describe him in verse 5, they say “he loves our nation”. They don’t say that “he loves our God”. The second reason is that in verse 9, Jesus makes a distinction between the centurion, on the one hand, and “Israel”, on the other. He may have loved the nation of Israel, but he hadn’t become a part of Israel by virtue of his conversion.

And so, when we see Jesus responding to the elders’ request in verse 6, it’s not because the centurion is a part of God’s covenant people. He is still a Gentile, a foreigner to God’s covenant, and therefore a foreigner to God himself. Instead, Jesus responds to the request because that’s his mission: to fulfill God’s plan of salvation for all people, regardless of whether they are part of Israel.

As Jesus approaches the centurion’s home, the centurion sends another delegation to Jesus, this time to deliver a personal message. Look at 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.”

The first delegation spoke to Jesus with their own words on the centurion’s behalf. This second delegation spoke to Jesus with the centurion’s own words, and the contrast between the two messages couldn’t have been more different. In verse 4, the Jewish elders said, “He is *worthy* to have you do this for him”. In verse 6, the centurion himself says, “I am not *worthy* to have you come under my roof.”

This is the first reason why Jesus ultimately chooses to heal the centurion’s beloved servant. The centurion was a humble man. The Jewish elders believed that Jesus should respond to the centurion’s request because he deserved it. Jesus responds to the centurion’s request because he knew he didn’t deserve it.

People who think that they deserve things in life are proud people. They look at their accomplishments, their successes, and their status in life, and they tell themselves, “Because I have done all *this*, therefore I deserve all *that*.”

The centurion himself didn’t think like this. He could have. He had all the credentials. He had the right accomplishments, the right successes, and the right status, but before Jesus, he didn’t depend on any of it. He didn’t say, “Jesus, you owe me this healing”, because “I’m rich and powerful”, or because “I’ve been kind to my servant”, or because “I’ve done my religious duty by building a synagogue for your people.” He doesn’t say any of that. Instead, he says, “Jesus, you don’t owe me anything. I could never deserve this request, no matter who I am or what I could do.” That’s what humility looks like.

When you ask God for something, are you proud, or are you humble? Do you say, “God, you owe me for all the good things I’ve done?” I think we all have to admit that we’ve had moments like this. You work hard all day with the kids at home, or you give X amount of money to the church, or you’ve shared the gospel with a bunch of people, and you start thinking that God *owes you*, and that you *deserve* certain things from God.

The reality is that the only thing we deserve from God is his just punishment for our sin. That’s it. All the other things God gives us in life - whether it’s our health, our friends, our families, our material possessions, our jobs, or our church – aren’t given to us because we’ve done anything to deserve them.They’re given to us because God is good and wants to be generous to us. They’re undeserved *gifts*, not deserved *rewards*

When we start thinking that we deserve the things that God has given us, we have lost sight of two things: the holiness of God, and the sinfulness of man. We forget that God is so holy, and we are so sinful, that we could never deserve the good things that he has chosen to give us. We forget that when Isaiah saw the holiness of God in Isaiah 6, he was so convicted of his sin that he cried out, “Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips!” We forget that when Peter saw the holiness of Jesus in Luke 5, he said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Humility before God starts with a right view of ourselves, and a right view of ourselves only comes from a right view of God.

If we come to God with pride rather than humility, then we start entering dangerous territory. We all know what happens when we don’t get what we think we deserve. We become bitter. When I don’t get the respect I think I deserve from my kids, I can become bitter towards them. So it is with God. When we come to God for something in prayer and we don’t get it, and we think that we deserve it, we become bitter. Or when God gives us pain in life and we think we deserve better, we become bitter. The pride that makes us believe that we deserve things from God will inevitably lead us to become bitter towards God, because God won’t always give us what we want. He gives us what we need, but he doesn’t always give us what we want, because what we want isn’t always good for us.

The centurion’s example challenges us to come to God not in pride, but in humility, and the only way we become humble people is by knowing that God acts for us not because we are worthy, but because he is good, kind, and merciful.

(2) **COME TO JESUS WITH FAITH**

As essential as humility is, it is only half of this first building block that we need to build a solid foundation of obedience to Christ. We need humility to know that we don’t deserve what Jesus offers us, but we also need faith so that we actually believe that Jesus can offer us what we need. This leads to our second point: Come to Jesus with Faith.

If you’re a parent, you know that your children can amaze you in two different ways. On the one hand, we can be amazed by our kids when they show exceptional qualities. They show compassion towards another person, or they accomplish a task far better than we expected them to, or they demonstrate wisdom beyond their years. On the other hand, we can be amazed by our kids when they seem to show an inability to do the right thing. They refuse to listen to advice that you know will protect them, or they keep making the same foolish decisions again and again, or they show a stunning lack of consideration for those around them.

There are only two times across all four Gospels in which Jesus is described as marveling at something. The first is right here in our text, where Jesus marvels at people like a parent who is amazed at his child’s good qualities. Verse 9 says that Jesus “marveled” at the centurion’s faith. Faith is what amazes Jesus. It seems simple enough, but it’s not simple. It is an exceptional quality, a rare one, and not easy to find in people.

The second is in Mark 6:6, where Jesus marvels at people like a parent who is amazed at their child’s poor qualities. In that text, Jesus encounters a group of people who refused to believe in him despite seeing his miraculous works. Mark 6:6 says that Jesus “marveled because of their unbelief.”

In short, the only two things Jesus is said to marvel at are faith, and lack of faith. He is amazed when people display belief in him, and he is amazed when people display unbelief in him. He marvels at faith because it is rare, but he also marvels at lack of faith because it doesn’t make any sense.

If anything makes sense in this world, it is faith in Jesus. Jesus didn’t just do some miracles here and there and give us some interesting things to think about. He gave the world a radical new ethic that has been studied and applied for two thousand years. He did miracles that testify to his declaration that he was sent from God. He willingly laid down his life so that sinners could be forgiven. And when Jesus was crucified, killed, and buried, three days later God raised him from the dead, appearing to hundreds of eyewitnesses, before he ascended into heaven, waiting for the time to return and usher in the fullness of his kingdom.

Faith in Jesus makes sense, but it’s rare, because there’s something in us that keeps us from wanting to put our faith in Jesus. It’s our sin. Our sin separates us from God, and our sin continues to separate us from God, so that we do not and cannot come to him through faith in Christ. We need God’s help to come to Jesus. We need him to draw us to himself, to give us faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, so that our relationship with God can be restored.

Jesus of course knows all this. He’s not amazed at unbelief because he’s surprised by it. He’s amazed at unbelief because it shows just how broken we are.

This is why Jesus is so amazed when he meets someone with a strong faith. That’s how he responds to the centurion’s faith. He marvels at the centurion’s faith because it’s so rare for Jesus to meet someone like him. And having met him, he immediately holds the centurion up as an example for us to follow. Verse 9 says, “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 points us to the centurion and says, “Look at this man’s faith! It is amazing! I want all of you to be like him.”

One of the things I love about this story is how easy it is to relate to the centurion. You’ve probably heard the saying, “Seeing is believing”. People say that faith in Jesus is hard because they’ve never seen him. They say it’s unfair for God to expect them to have the same faith as the people in the Bible who were actually there when Jesus was here on earth. That’s not true of the centurion. He never saw Jesus perform any miracles. In fact, he had never even seen Jesus himself, and yet he had a stunning faith that is held up by Jesus as the ultimate example to follow. The centurion came to Jesus the same way we must come to Jesus, and therefore the faith that he had can be our faith as well.

So what was so amazing about the centurion’s faith, and what are we to imitate? I want to point out two things to you.

The first is that the centurion knew that Jesus’ power had no limitations. He knew that Jesus could heal any way, anywhere. The centurion says in verse 7, “Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.”

Miraculous healing is a big deal. It doesn’t happen every day. Even if you had the rare opportunity to meet someone who can perform miracles, you can imagine the kinds of thoughts that would run through your mind. “Maybe he only has a certain number of miracles he can do each day. Or maybe he needs to follow a certain ritual for different kinds of miracles. He needs to move his hands this way, or speak these words, or use some sort of talisman or other magical object that channels his miraculous power.” At the very least, you would assume that Jesus would have to be physically present, so that he could touch the person or speak words over the person being healed.

The centurion didn’t struggle with any of these thoughts or doubts. Instead, he says, “Just say the word, and my servant will be healed”. He was so confident in Jesus’ miraculous power that he knew it wouldn’t take anything other than a word from Jesus’ mouth to miraculously heal his beloved servant. His servant didn’t need to hear this word. His servant didn’t need to be touched by Jesus. A simple word spoken by Jesus from a distance would be sufficient.

Jesus wants us to have the same confidence in his miraculous power. When we’re praying for a sick loved one, Jesus wants us to be able to say, “Just say the word, and she will be healed.” Jesus doesn’t need to do anything else, for his miraculous power has no limits.

The second distinguishing feature of the centurion’s faith is that he believed Jesus possessed divine authority. He says in 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.’”

Authority is the right to tell others what to do. It’s not the same as being bossy. Being bossy is telling others what to do when you don’t have authority. But when you tell others what to do and you do have authority, you’re just doing your job.

The centurion was very familiar with the concept of authority. He had the right to tell all one hundred soldiers in his century to do things. He could tell them to clean their armour. He could tell them to march 100 miles. He could tell them to jump off a cliff. Whatever he told them to do, they had to obey.

Now the centurion is saying that Jesus has authority just like he has authority. But that’s not all he’s saying. He’s also saying that Jesus had authority over things that ordinary people just don’t have. He knew that Jesus had authority over physical illness. And if his servant’s illness was the result of spiritual forces, he was confident that Jesus’ authority extended to them as well. Jesus could order physical illness and demonic forces just as the centurion ordered his soldiers, and both would have to bow to his word.

It can be easy for us to start thinking about God as being in an epic tug of war with demonic forces. Sometimes the rope is pulled in the demons’ favour, and other times it’s pulled in God’s favour. It depends on the day and how tired everyone is. There’s no epic tug of war going on in the heavenly realms. God has ultimate authority over all spiritual forces of evil and all the brokenness of the world, so that what he says must be done, and all of this authority has been given to Jesus Christ. This is what the centurion believed, and this is what we are called to believe as well.

(3) **COME TO JESUS WITH ASSURANCE**

The centurion’s story ends in verse 10: “And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.” It’s apparent that the actual healing is secondary to the rest of the story. It’s like a mere footnote. Luke writes the account this way because the miracle isn’t the point of the centurion’s story. Ultimately, the point isn’t even the centurion’s faith. Instead, the main point of the story is the one the centurion put his faith in. It’s about who Jesus is, and what he has come to do. The same is true of the second story in our text, which leads to our third point: Come to Jesus with Assurance.

Luke tells us in verses 11-12 that, after Jesus healed the centurion’s servant, he went to a town called Nain, where he comes upon a funeral procession. A young man had died, leaving his widowed mother both husband-less and child-less. Verses 13-15 tell us what happens next: “And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep.’ Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, ‘Young man, I say to you, arise.’ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.’”

This obviously was an amazing miracle, but given what we just read about Jesus and his authority, it really comes as no surprise. Jesus has divine authority that knows no limits, and now he displays that divine authority by raising the dead man to life with nothing more than the words of his mouth. In this way, Jesus confirms for us what the centurion had said about him. All Jesus has to say is “Go”, and even death will flee from him.

I don’t think that’s all Luke wants us to learn from this story. There’s something else he wants us to see about Jesus in addition to this display of his divine power and authority, and it’s found in verse 13: “And when the Lord saw her, he had *compassion* on her”.

Here, Luke shows us that Jesus isn’t just one who possesses authority. He is also one who possesses compassion. He doesn’t impassively look upon our suffering and act because duty calls him to. He views our pain with grief, and he acts for us out of love. He is moved to intervene in the midst of our trials, to help us in our darkness, to restore our broken lives, because he sees our pain and he wants to do something about it.

This is why we can come to Jesus in humble faith. We can come to him with the assurance that he cares for us. In this world, people with power tend to help others for selfish gain. They help others only so that they can help themselves. They want to show off their power and authority, or they want something in return from those they help. Jesus isn’t like that. He helps us because he loves us. And when we don’t have the strength to come to him, he comes to us. The widowed mother of the dead man didn’t come to Jesus. Jesus came to her. She was in too much grief to do anything but mourn. But Jesus had compassion on her. He broke into her darkness and brought the light of life.

That’s what Jesus did for us when he came to the world as a man. He lived a perfect life on our behalf, died on a cross for our sins, and rose from the dead so that through faith in him we could be declared righteous before God. Humanity wasn’t looking for Jesus. Jesus was looking for us. He came to us when we refused to come to him, because he had compassion on us. And now, because of what he has done for us through his life, death, and resurrection, we can know his compassion both in this life, and in the eternal life to come.

**CONCLUSION**

Whatever burdens you may have, Jesus is calling you to come to him. At any moment of any day, we can come to him through prayer. Whether you’re a Christian already or you have never yet put your faith in Christ, you can come to him and find that Jesus is both a mighty king who possesses all authority, and a compassionate friend who cares for your soul.

Our text today gives us a model to follow as we bring our requests to God in prayer. We can so often spend most of our prayer time simply asking God for things. Don’t do that. If you are going to grow in humble faith, and show the kind of faith that Jesus is amazed by, then we need to tell God in our prayers that we know we are unworthy of his help. We need to tell him that we could never deserve his help, and that if he would answer our prayers, it’s purely the result of his grace and not our works. And after we have made our requests to God, tell him that all he needs to do is say the word, and it will be done. Show him your faith in his authority over all the darkness in the world by telling him that you believe that he can do all things.

This is what we need to begin building a foundation of obedience to Jesus that will keep us strong through the storms of this life. Strength comes from humble faith in Jesus, who supplies all that we need to obey him.