

Text: Luke 7:1-16

Title: Faith and Fear

Truth: Faith and fear toward the Lord are a perfect way to approach God.

Date/Location: January 21, 2023 at FBC

Introduction

Luke continues to introduce us to Jesus. Jesus has just completed the Sermon on the Plateau (Mount?), and we read now of more miraculous activity that calls for a response.

I. The Centurion's Faith, v. 1-10

- A. We could title the section "The Centurion's Servant," but the account of the servant is only a vehicle that carries a much more important message.
- B. The centurion had a servant who was very dear to him, and he wished for him not to die. This does not match the typical picture you might formulate in your mind about a centurion—a man with no regard for the lives of others, a brutal killer. Not this man. He was caring, if not devout. He was like Cornelius (Acts 10) or the centurion at the cross of Jesus (Matt. 27:54). So, he enlisted the help of Jewish elder friends to approach Jesus and ask him to come and heal the servant. In one sense, it did not take much to convince the elders to do this because he had funded the construction of a synagogue for them and loved the Jewish nation. They would not want to disappoint him. But there may be another angle: were these Jewish leaders hesitant to go to *Jesus* because they did not like His teaching or because their peers would look askance at them for doing so?

A note of application: You do not need to use an intermediary to ask for Jesus to help you. In fact, *you should* not use one. Instead, go to Jesus directly and ask His help.

If you compare this passage to the parallel in Matthew 8:5-13, it appears that the centurion went to Jesus personally. This can be explained in two ways: either the centurion went *and* sent messengers either before or after, or Matthew's account attributes to the centurion directly the actions of his representatives. We do this all the time with "the President did such and such" when he did not do the act itself, but an agent of the president did it.

- C. Jesus went with these Jewish leaders to help the Gentile soldier. Jesus was responsive to the man's request. But he became hesitant—he did

not want Jesus to come all the way to his house. His eager desire to help the servant had instigated him to send for help. But now second thoughts may have crept in, like Peter (“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man,” Luke 5:8). Was He worthy of “bothering” the Lord, or was he seeking a favor he should not have, or was he too sinful, or was Jesus too high and holy to associate with a lowly centurion? Conviction of sin does this to a person—it draws him or her to Jesus, but it also makes him hesitate at the same time.

- D. The hesitancy to treat Jesus as “common” is commendable and calls to mind the notion that He is a powerful King. He is the Son of God. He is not to be trifled with—by a Roman soldier or by you. The centurion does not make up his faith just to get Jesus to help him—he really has it. But he is also serious that he is unworthy.

This is like with the lion Aslan of the Chronicles of Narnia, the question arises: “Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.” The response: “He isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

You want to maintain this two-fold attitude: humility and drawing near. If you are humble before God so that you recognize you are unworthy and that He is utterly holy, *and* at the same time you are not satisfied with anything but sticking close to Him, you are in good shape.

- E. The solution he wisely constructs is to exhibit his faith and keep Jesus at a bit of an arm’s length by asking him to just say the word. He explains that he himself does not have to go everywhere and micromanage everything. He just says a word and it is done. Similarly, he believes that Jesus has the power to simply command the healing and it will occur. He genuinely believes that Jesus has that kind of power to act remotely. He has seen or heard of it in action.
- F. What Jesus did seems like a projection of power from a distance. But the omnipotent God is also omnipresent, so wherever His work is required, He is immediately right there. Not that distance would be a hindrance! Jesus in his humanity is not where the sick person is located, but He *is* present in the second person of the Trinity.
- G. The centurion understands that faith and authority are related ideas. You exercise faith in Jesus because He has authority. You trust in Him because He has power to do not only miracles like healing sickness, but also like saving your soul from its original natural destiny. You trust in Him because He authoritatively tells you to *and* invites you to do so. You

believe Him because you know He has the power to forgive sins, and the power to judge.

- H. The marvel of this is that it is a demonstration of powerful faith in a man you would never expect. It is more powerful than the faith Jesus had encountered among the people of Israel up to this point.
- I. The Lord sent the friends away and told them as they believed, it was done. And it was! The centurion had blessed the people of Abraham with his friendship and philanthropy, and in turn God blessed Him!

II. God Visits the City of Nain, v. 11-16

- A. Where was Nain? It was a village in southern Galilee, south of Capernaum, near Samaria. It was a walled city with a gate in the tribal allotment of Issachar. It is almost 10 miles from Nazareth, probably the city called Nein today. There is historical testimony that a church building existed there because of this miracle. It was near to Capernaum because the text tells us it was “the day after” the events of 7:1-10. The setting also included a large crowd, who would serve as eyewitnesses. There were tombs near the eastern gate of the city.
- B. The situation was terribly sad. A woman had lost her husband, and now she has lost her only son. The circumstances were even more poignant because the son was a young man. Something tragic had happened and he had reached full normal age. A large crowd from the city was mourning with the mother. They joined the large crowd already with Jesus.
- C. The Lord felt compassion toward her. Anyone with a true human spirit would do the same. In addition, the plight of widows and orphans is of special concern to God (Malachi 3:5, James 1:27). Jesus is still the same compassionate savior that He was then.
- D. The resurrection miracle. Jesus touches the coffin. We might wonder if that is an unclean thing to do—but for Jesus it does not matter. His holiness drives away any uncleanness around Him. Plus, He has the keys of death, meaning he has power over it.

Three times the Bible records Jesus raising someone from the dead: Lazarus (John 11), Jairus’s daughter (Luke 8:49), and this one. Luke 7:22 may even indirectly refer to other resurrections. Jesus had power over life. Like we said from Luke 5:24, these miracles show that Jesus has the power to forgive sins, among other things.

In this case, He simply addresses the young man as if he were sleeping and tells him to arise.

E. The young man obeyed! The “mechanics” of this is beyond our comprehension. If we presume that at his death one or more angels accompanied his spirit to paradise (Luke 16:22)—I am assuming he was a believer in God—then at Jesus’s word those angels may have taken his spirit *back* the way they came through the unseen world and sent him back into his body. This was like when God “breathed into him the breath of life” when He created Adam. Then, on the material side of things, whatever physical malady had afflicted him, *and* whatever decomposition had already begun in his body—The Lord repaired both by His powerful word. The God who can create man from the dust of the ground can easily do this. Jesus demonstrates that He has all power over the realm of the spirits as well as the realm that we see. Jesus still and always possesses this power.

Every resurrection in Scripture is an illustration of how God can take a living person, unbelieving and thus spiritually dead, and call them by means of the gospel, and they come to life. The gospel brings with it the regenerating power of life. The fact that God’s Son gave Himself to rescue you from your sinful state, all the way to His own death, and rose again from the dead has in it the power to save your soul. My words that YOU need Him may fall on dead and deaf ears at this moment. But when the Lord is pleased, He will do a voice-over—his voice over mine—and with His power at work you will hear what He is saying and be irresistibly drawn to Him who alone can save.

F. Response of the People

1. **Fear** seized the crowd. It was amazing and troubling at the same time. How can someone raise another person from the dead?

To put off fear, modern people say things like, “You cannot raise a dead person, so this is a myth.” Or, “there are lots of stories of people who were in a coffin but were not dead.” I just heard one of these—when the ambulance in India was carrying a body to the morgue, it hit a pothole. The person in the coffin awoke and “rose again” from the dead. Or, “medical science resuscitates people all the time and brings them back from the dead.” People today appeal to naturalism or science as an explanation for phenomenon they otherwise cannot explain. In that way, they do not have to deal with God.

2. They **glorified** God. They had to invoke the divine because mere humanity, mere science, mere nature could in no way explain what they had just witnessed.
3. The crowd in general recognized Jesus as a **prophet**. This was like Old Testament times with Elijah and Elisha.
4. They recognized that God had **visited** the nation. They may have thought about this indirectly, like “God visited us through the prophet Jesus ben Joseph.” I think of it more directly, like God visiting the nation *in* the person of Jesus, so God was present directly. For God to “visit” is more than just stop by to say hello. It means to grace with His presence; to provide blessing that naturally comes with that presence.

Conclusion

We see fear and faith mixed in the response of the centurion. We see fear in the crowd, and no doubt Jesus’s miracles in both cases were the impetus for faith in some of the onlookers. Do you also fear Jesus and believe in Him to the saving of your soul?

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