

# Luke 7

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Chapter 7, which is on page 863. And really what I want us to see is the surprise in the chapter. I wonder if they've ever been surprised coming to church.

! I was talking to a man this week who said that he, I was working in the city in London. He was a Hindu, a practicing Hindu. He saw a crowd of people going into church. He went into church about lunchtime.

He was there for 20 minutes. He heard somebody preach about the Lord Jesus Christ. He walked in a Hindu. And to his own surprise, and certainly his family's surprise, he walked out a Christian and a believer and a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are times there, even when you've read the Bible as long as I have, you are greatly surprised. Maybe there's a surprising claim or something in the Bible that you stop and you see the surprise of it.

So in Luke's Gospel, it's also familiar, isn't it? At Christmas time with the nativity scene, you have the shepherds. But it is surprising, isn't it? That the lowly, uneducated, poor, irreligious shepherds, they are the ones that are chosen to be the kind of first tellers of God made man, the incarnation.

[ 1 : 1 2 ] It's surprising, isn't it? At the beginning of Jesus' mind, he isn't worshipped by the scripture-saturated, church-flowing scribes. The people who know their Bible.

Or any of the expected Jews in Jerusalem. But instead, he's worshipped by Gentile Magi. Milton called them star-led wizards. Who came from hundreds of miles to see him.

Both of those things are surprising. They're not what you'd expect. And as you stop and think about them, they are wonderfully surprising. And they make you love the Bible more. They make you love the God of the Bible more.

So that's the first place we see surprise. This kind of stop shock. But the second one I want to talk about is, well really, let's see the surprise in the passage.

It's a familiar story, it looks like. The centurion, this man in charge of a hundred soldiers. And I want to show you what is so thrilling about it. If you can look at verse 9.

[ 2 : 1 1 ] First line is the little letters. The chapters are the big numbers. So verse 9, when Jesus heard these things, on page 863, he marveled at him. He marveled at him.

He was amazed. To put it another way, Jesus was taken aback. Jesus was filled with astonishment. Jesus was shocked. Or even quite simply, Jesus was surprised.

That's what it means. By what he just heard. Now what surprises Jesus? Have you thought about that? What surprises Jesus? It's one of the only places in the Gospels where Jesus is taken aback. Where he is surprised by what happens. And the answer is faith. Faith like this faith surprises him. But in verse 9 again.

He marveled at him. Turned to the crowd that followed him. He said, I tell you, not even Israel have I found such faith. Now let me ask you another question. What's so amazing? What is so astonishing?

[ 3 : 1 6 ] What is so surprising to Jesus about this man's faith? Well, there's a few things that could be surprising. First of all, was it that he was a Roman soldier? To put it differently.

This man is a Gentile. He's somebody who's not a Jew. And worse than that, from a Jewish perspective, he's a Roman. Much worse, from a Jewish zealous perspective, he's a Roman centurion.

He symbolises all of Rome's authority. He has a hundred soldiers in his charge. And this man in the ancient world is a powerful man.

He's wearing the wrong uniform for the Jews. He's on the wrong eye of the religious schemeer. He was a Roman enemy officer. And is that what surprises Jesus?

That a man like this has faith? Well, perhaps. But actually, I'm not sure about that. I'm not sure Jesus was surprised that this Gentile had faith. He'd already encountered Gentiles, non-Jews, who'd believed in him.

[ 4 : 22 ] So he mentioned to me the Magi. Those wizards that had come from hundreds of miles away to worship him. Surely somebody would have told him that story when he was a boy. I said, perhaps.

Because it wouldn't have surprised him that Gentiles, people who were non-Jews, had come to faith. Because in his Bible, in the Old Testament, it's spoken about that all the time. Hosea said, those who are not my people, I will call my people.

Those who are not my beloved, I will call beloved. Isaiah, of course, he had his voice. God spoke through Isaiah and said that Gentiles would bind themselves to the Lord.

And they would serve him and they would love him. They would love the name of the Lord. Isaiah spoke that God's house would be a house of prayer for all the nations.

Do you remember Simeon? When Jesus was a little boy at the temple. He said, now let your servant depart in peace according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation.

[ 5 : 23 ] My eyes have seen your salvation. You've prepared in the sight of all the peoples. A light of revelation to the Gentiles.

And glory to your people Israel. In Jesus, non-Jews like you and me would find their salvation, their rescue. And I think Jesus knew that. So I don't think he was any more surprised that this centurion has come to faith.

Than the centurion we found in Acts chapter 10, certainly. Because the Holy Spirit was opening the eyes of the Gentiles. Even mighty military men.

Okay then, what surprised Jesus? Was it that this Roman soldier worked with the Jews to ask for Jesus for help?

Or perhaps? Possibly isn't it? It's surprising to me. At least when I read verses 3 to 5. The centurion adhered with Jesus. And so he sent some of the elders of the Jews to him.

[ 6 : 25 ] To ask Jesus to come and help his servants. And when they come to Jesus, they plead earnestly with him. They say, this man, this centurion, deserves you to have you do this.

Because this man loves our nation. He's Roman, yes. But he loves our nation. And he helped us build the synagogue. Now as you read the Gospels, you find that the Jews and the Romans working together was unheard of for something good.

For something in favour of Jesus. So as we read that, it should take us a back. Are you telling me that the Roman centurion, that he called on the Jews, those prominent social and religious leaders, to see if they would go and see Jesus?

And see if he would come back and be his servant? Are they friends? So if you can go through the Gospels and all that, they're not normally friends, are they? Jews do not normally like Romans, and Romans do not normally like Jews.

Well, it seems like they're friends here, isn't it? And the reason they're friends is given to us in the passage. Can you look at the end of verse 5? This thing to me, he loves our nation, and he's the one who built us our synagogue.

[ 7 : 39 ] Or he helped build it. He either funded it, or he supplied people to help build it. So either he's a God-fearing, a God-fearing Gentile, that is a convert to Judaism, or at least he's somebody who's sympathetic, of those he oversees, of those whom he polices, those he guards.

Well, maybe. Maybe he's both. Whatever it is, Jesus actually doesn't seem very surprised by the Jews and the Gentiles working together. So that's our question.

What takes Jesus aback? Why is Jesus surprised? Was it that the Roman soldier, the Roman centurion, wanted Jesus' help on behalf of his servant?

Look at verses 1 and 2. After he'd finished all his sayings, and that is the Sermon on the Plain, the little sayings of Jesus, like I love your enemies, he entered Capernaum.

And now a centurion had a servant who was sick, and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. Isn't that an interesting phrase? Highly valued. How was he highly valued?

[ 8 : 51 ] Ask that question. In which sense? The servant might have been highly valued, in that he was useful. A good servant is hard to find, I'm told.

Or he might be highly valued, in that centurion loved him. Like he loved one of his own children. He probably valued him in both those ways.

He was a useful servant, and he was also a servant who was more like a son to him. Now what is potentially surprising, is if we lived in the Greco-Roman world, if we lived in the world that Jesus lived, the average slave owner had very little time in regard for slaves.

He treated them like animals. So in his book Ethics, the philosopher Aristotle said, there should be no friendship between inanimate things, such as a horse or an ox, or a slave.

Roman writers, Zavaire or Ketel, said the only difference between a slave and a beast, and a cart, was that the slave talked. Do you see the surprise? Once he put it in his historical setting, it is surprising, isn't it?

[ 9 : 59 ] But this high-powered soldier, this mighty soldier of the establishment, cared about a lonely slave. Let the slave die, acquire another one. Or at the very least, don't humiliate yourself in front of everyone, by begging to this Jesus, a man of little social consequence.

But even though the centurion is asking for his servant to be healed, I don't think that surprises Jesus at all. If anyone was a high-ranking person, well, it is Jesus, isn't it?

God incarnate is as high as he can, I'd argue. And yet he cared for the poor and the suffering people. I don't think Jesus is surprised by this.

So what was it? What was it that surprised Jesus about this man's faith? Was it that this powerful man humbly trusted in Jesus' absolute authority?

Was it that this powerful man trusted absolutely and humbly in Jesus' authority? And the answer is yes.

[ 11 : 08 ] Yes. Yes, what is so surprising is that this powerful man humbly trusted in Jesus, not just a little bit, but all of his absolute authority.

Every word that the Roman centurion says in verses 6 to 9, it's important. You can have to line it. You can star it. You can mark it. You can kiss it if you want. Just listen to what he says in verse 6. And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, he said to him, and said to him, Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to come, for you to come under my roof.

Therefore I do not presume to come to you, but say the word, and let my servant be healed, for I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. Come and he comes, and to my servant do this, and he does it.

Notice four things, okay? First notice that the centurion sent friends to Jesus to relay the message. And so the centurion at this point has never met him.

[ 12 : 14 ] The centurion has never met Jesus. He's only heard about him. He hears about Jesus earlier on in the passage, and he responds in faith.

It is as if, as Paul said later on in the New Testament, faith comes by hearing. Faith comes through hearing. So do not underestimate what we're doing this morning.

And what we do every Sunday, what we're doing right now, that I am preaching to you, and Lord willing, you are listening, hopefully. And that is according to the Bible, how faith gets into you.

Through your ears. Ears, as you might say. So open that. The second thing to notice is the first word he says.

Can you see what the first word is? What's the first word he says? What is the title he uses? He uses the title Lord. He calls Jesus Lord.

[ 13 : 16 ] The Greek word for Lord is Kyrios. And it's the same word that is found in the Greek Septuagint, the way that the Greeks would translate the Old Testament. Whenever they translated Lord God, they translated it as Lord.

Now even if this Gentile is speaking better than he knows, either way, that title is significant, isn't it? It is symbolically significant.

Here is a centurion who is officially under the lordship of who? Of Caesar. To the Romans. Caesar, not Jesus, is called Kyrios, called Lord.

And so this title for Jesus in the Gospels, well, it's the most common way believers talk about him, isn't it? How do believers talk about Jesus? They call Jesus Lord.

Unbelievers have other titles. They're respectful titles. They call him Rabbi or they call him Teacher. In Luke 7 verse 40, the Pharisee Simon calls Jesus Teacher. Teacher is a tame title for Jesus.

[ 14 : 30 ] But the Gospels teach you that Jesus is more than a carpenter. And he's more than a teacher. He is, as the centurion put it, he is Lord. Third thing we notice is that the centurion is humble, isn't it?

After it, he says, don't trouble yourself. Do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy for you to come under my roof. Just glance at verse 4.

What do the Jews say about him? Can you notice this? What's the word they use in verse 4? They say, he is worthy. He's worthy to have you come to do this for him.

This guy, this Roman centurion, he really deserves you to do something for him, Jesus. But then glance at verse 7. At verse 6, I mean.

Lord, do not tell me yourself, for I am not worthy. The Jews say, hey, this man is worthy, so lend him your ears. Do what he says, he is servant. But here the worthy man says to himself, I am not worthy.

[15:36] I love it. Jesus loves it too. Jesus eats up humility. God opposes the proud, but he gives grace for the humble.

Listen, it is surprising that Jesus actually starts to walk towards this man. And he's seemingly very welcome to enter it, isn't he? Listen, I was a Gentile.

Jews do not knock on Gentile doors, and they certainly don't cross the threshold of the house, because in the house there might be, well, there might not be kosher foods. They might not have had a ceremony of cleansing.

It's a dangerous thing to do, and yet Jesus, he is willing to do it. But more surprising is that this military man won't even let him do it because of his own sinfulness. He sees himself as too unworthy and too beneath Jesus.

And that is surprising, isn't it? Because in Luke chapter 9 and verse 58, Jesus will save himself. I've got nowhere to lay my head. I've got no roof over my head.

[16:43] I've got no home that I can call my own. So you see, what is so worthy about Jesus, what is so worthy about this homeless Jew, you see humility there, don't you, from the centurion.

A Gentile military leader who commands a large number of soldiers, who is wealthy, who earned a nice salary as a Roman centurion, who funds a major building project for the Jews and the synagogue, who very likely as a household of slaves, he thinks that Jesus is so worthy that it's unthinkable that the Lord should enter into his house.

It's interesting, it's amazing, it's surprising. So notice the hearing, through hearing alone, he has faith alone in Christ alone. Notice the word that he calls Jesus, he calls him Lord.

Notice the humility and fourthly and finally, notice that this powerful man humbly trusted in Jesus, absolute authority. Listen again to verse 7 and 8.

Therefore, I do not presume to come to you, but say the word and let my servant be healed. For I, too, am a man under authority with soldiers under me and I say to one girl and he goes and I say to another come and he comes.

[18:03] The centurion, he knows how authority works. If he told one of his soldiers to go, he went. If he told one of his soldiers to fight, he fought. If he told one of his soldiers to stand and intentionally, he did it.

I had a rugby coach when I was a teenager and if he told you to stop and drop to the floor and do 20 press-ups, he did it immediately. And if he said, I do 20 star jumps, he did it.

If he said, go on that line and run to that line and run back, he did it. He had absolute authority. As a parent, if I tell my children to get up, get dressed, brush their teeth, brush their hair and get ready for church, then they immediately do it.

No. That's said with the rugby field children. In the gym or on the training pitch, he was a man of absolute authority. If I say jump, you say how high.

Now, whatever authority illustration works for you, you use it. This man, he knew how authority worked. He was a man of authority. He was a man of great authority.

[19:09] There's an interesting story about King David in 2 Samuel 23. David and his men are fighting against the Philistines. They're hiding out in a cave and they're waiting there for the right time to attack the enemy army.

The enemy army has made their stronghold in the city of Bethlehem in David's hometown. David, where David was born and raised. And as they were waiting for the right time to attack, David says out loud, oh, I'd love someone to get me a drink from the well that is in Bethlehem by the gates.

It's like we say, I'd love a can of Coke from the shop on the corner. Now, he might have been thirsty, but actually David wasn't serious I would think in that passage.

I don't think David was giving an order. I think David there is voicing a frustration, there's a military frustration, oh, I wish I could go to my hometown, to my home well and get the water that I love. Oh, I've drank all my life. But he couldn't because it was occupied by the enemy. Anyway, the interesting thing is there's a few soldiers, three of them hear what he said and they take it as a command.

[ 20 : 19 ] And off they went. It's absurd, this absurd kind of life endangered error. But somehow it's successful. We read about it, these three mighty men of David, they break through the Philistine ranks, they draw water over the well, which was by the gate, and they carry it and they bring it back to David.

Mission accomplished. It's an incredible thing to do. That story's got a very odd ending, I won't give it to you, but you can read it this afternoon. But it demonstrates this, it shows you and I this, it demonstrates the supreme authority of a word spoken by God's anointed king.

I'm thirsty. I want water. Your water, sir. I mean Lord. And as Christians, as those who may be reading Luke's gospel, if you have, you will know that Jesus is the son of David, who's a far greater king than David.

And we know that he has all authority in heaven and earth. And we know that he spoke creation into existence. And we know that Jesus is divine, he's the second person of the Holy Trinity.

But think about this, what did the centurion know? What did the centurion know about Jesus? Well actually, not very much. What he did know is that Jesus had authority.

[ 21 : 45 ] And Jesus had authority over death and disease. He didn't hear that much about it through news of Jesus' miracles. He knew that Jesus had almighty authority to do to do what the centurion was asking to do.

With just one command. As I order my troops to go from here to there, I want you, Jesus, to stop death. And I believe death will stop now because you say.

Now as I study this passage this week, there's a question that keeps coming up in my mind. That I thought Jesus would respond differently. I thought Jesus would respond differently. Something like, hey, Mr.

Centurion, hey, Mr. Finkshot, you cannot make a theological presumption. You can't think that I work in the same way that you do in your job. You can't make a theological assumption based on your occupational experience.

In other words, just because you are the people around Mr. Centurion, and they do what you say they should do, that doesn't mean how I work. That's not how my miracles work. They don't work on your terms.

[ 22 : 58 ] But of course, that's not what Jesus says yet. Aren't we glad that Jesus said Jesus are not me to save us from our sins? Because he is compassionate. I'm simply pointing out to you that Jesus is kind.

He's kind, and it seems that as you read the kind of miracle stories, that everyone who comes to him in faith, they might be a little bit superstitious. They might ask for things they shouldn't ask for. They might want miracles done on their own chairs, whatever. But the point is, whoever comes to faith in Jesus, Jesus is willing to work at their level.

Mustard seed faith? No problem. Big and bold faith like this? Fantastic. Just say a word, that'll work. First time tells the tale, doesn't it?

It's a true story. That speaking the word thing worked. It was no big deal to Jesus. And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

[ 24 : 04 ] Let me read that again. When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well. One commentator writes this, a greater miracle of healing than this is nowhere recorded in the gospels.

Without even seeing the sufferer, without a touch of the hand or a look in the eye, the Lord restores strength to this dying man, or he might be a boy, by a single word.

He speaks and the sick man is cured. He commands and the disease departs. So let me put it this way. Jesus' power in Luke 7 reminds me a lot of God's power.

In Genesis 1. It's the same word, isn't it? God said, let there be light, and there was light. God said, let there be life, and there was life.

A one-word miracle from a distance. Not a problem. Not a big deal for Jesus. What is a big deal, and what Jesus makes a big deal of, is this man's faith.

[ 25 : 10 ] Jesus marvels at it. Surprise, surprise, surprise. It's the whole point of the passage. So let me ask you this, wouldn't it be great to live a life, a life of faith, that Jesus would be taken aback by?

To live a life of faith that Jesus would be amazed at? Wouldn't it be great to have the sincerity, sensitivity, humility, love, depth of faith as this Gentile soldier?

To have unlimited confidence in Jesus' absolute authority? Wouldn't it be great to humbly trust in Jesus? This miracle was not written to teach you that any time you need a miracle, just ask and Jesus will give it.

They weren't written for that purpose. The miracles were written to show you the gospel, to show us the gospel in parable form. So for example, Jesus healed the paralytic. Do you remember the story?

He demonstrated that he had the power to heal. Well, yeah. But what is the point? He has the power to forgive sins. The power to forgive sins. And when Jesus healed Jairus' dead daughter and this centurion's dead servant, dying servant, what is the point?

[ 26 : 26 ] It shows he has authority over death and that he can forgive sins. He has authority over death. And when we see the centurion, this Gentile who needed a Jewish Messiah, this mighty man who desperately needed help, this worthy man who was so unworthy before Jesus, this commander of words who knew that only Jesus' word would work, when we see the centurion, we see faith.

We see the face of faith. This is what saving faith looks like. It looks like this. And it's what our faith should look like.

It's a story of salvation. salvation is not given to us based on our ethnic background. If you're a Jew, great. If you're not a Jew, not so great.

If you're Welsh, terrific. Anything else, not so much. It's not based on our ethnic background. It's not based on your generosity and charity.

You give money away for the temple, marvellous. You give money away for charity, good. But it won't get you into the kingdom of heaven. Salvation is not based on your moral worth.

[ 27 : 42 ] Are you a person who's praised for being worthy? For your good works, wonderful, but it's not so wonderful that it'll get you into heaven. The only ground, the only basis of salvation is faith.

What kind of faith? This kind of faith. A faith that abandons trust in ourselves and totally and without reservation relies on the person of Christ and the authority of his word.

Do you have this kind of faith? Do you? I know where to get it. It's right here, isn't it? It's right here in this story, in story form in the Bible.

And I know where else to find it. It is right there in heaven for the asking. And ask Jesus right now even to speak a word.

To speak a word into your hearts. And he will do it. Let's bow our heads in prayer. Let's pray.