

Unworthy

Essence of the Text: A centurion who recognized his unworthiness requested healing for his servant, and Jesus healed the servant.

Essence of the Sermon: The text reminds us that God graciously interacts with people, rather than responding to merit.

For the Christ Seeker: Understand that God does not owe you anything, but He offers you so much through His Son Jesus Christ. Believe in Him.

For the Christ Follower: Trust God, His grace and goodness, not your merit and goodness.

Introduction

We will look at Luke chapter seven for the message today.

Because of Jesus's declaration to forgive the paralytic's sins recorded in Luke 5:20, the religious leaders of Israel transitioned from investigating to antagonizing Jesus. They stopped wondering about Him and actively worked against Him. Since that time, Jesus's words and works continued to strengthen the case of His authority. This continues into chapters seven and eight

where two sets of similar miracles take place. In chapter seven, Jesus heals a man of sickness and raises a young man to life. In chapter eight, Jesus heals a woman of sickness and raises a young woman to life. A highlight theme of these miracles is the authority of Jesus, specifically identified in this miracle found in Luke 7:1-10.

Follow along as I read the text.

Bible

(1) Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. (2) And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. (3) And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. (4) And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: (5) For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. (6) Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: (7) Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. (8) For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. (9) When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. (10) And they that were sent,

returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

Luke 7:1-10 - KJV

Introduction

The text focuses on the interaction between Jesus and the centurion, though they never interact directly. Through the reports of four individuals and groups, the interaction reveals important truths about God's interaction with humanity. We'll look at these by considering the reports.

1...Luke's Report (vv. 1-3)

Explanation

Luke, the penman of this account of the Gospel, reports that following Jesus's teaching on the plain He returned to Capernaum. When He returned, a need of an individual was brought to His attention. However, it was not the person in need, but the person who interceded for the person in need who is the focus of this account.

A...His Class in the Service

Explanation

He was a centurion, a Roman commander in charge of a detachment of auxiliary troops under the authority of Herod Antipas - the ruler of Galilee and Perea. As such, he was a part of the occupying military force of Rome.

B...His Compassion for the Servant

Explanation

The centurion had a servant whose physical condition prevented him from any longer being useful to his master. Matthew's account says the servant was paralyzed. Roman law provided the master, the centurion in this case, the right to kill his servant/slave.

Instead, the text reveals the servant was "dear to him" (*Simplified KJV Bible Promise Book Edition, 2023, Luke 7:2*). The Greek word is "entimos", which means valuable, precious, honored, or of high status.

Notice the man-given right the centurion had contrasted with the attitude and action he actually took. Having the right and being or doing right are not the same. There's a lesson here in valuing others, regardless of status or race, as someone made in God's image.

C...His Call for the Savior

Explanation

Matthew's account shows the centurion himself coming to Jesus, while Luke's account shows the centurion sending Jewish elders to Jesus. Both are correct! If I send one of my children with a message for one of their siblings, on whose authority is the message based?

Are you shocked that a Roman centurion would seek out a Jewish rabbi? At that time, it was not an unusual occurrence for some Gentiles, like this centurion, to be drawn to the Jewish faith.

They were called God fearers. The New Testament has other reports of centurions who responded to the Jewish religion and then Jesus positively. Other than this centurion, think of one who oversaw Jesus's crucifixion. That centurion, after witnessing the events of the crucifixion, "glorified God, saying, 'Certainly this was a righteous man'" (*Simplified KJV Bible Promise Book Edition*, 2023, Luke 23:47). Another centurion, named Cornelius, was "a devout man and one who feared God with all his house, who gave many charitable gifts to the people and always prayed to God" (*Simplified KJV Bible Promise Book Edition*, 2023, Acts 10:2). To him, God's Spirit sent Peter to share the Gospel of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Over and over, Luke, in the book that bears his name and Acts, demonstrates God's love for ALL the lost. God loves ALL the lost!

2...The Elders' Report (vv. 4-5)

Explanation

After introducing the context, Luke relates the account details. In his account, the centurion heard Jesus was in town and sent Jewish elders to Jesus with his request. We'll know why a little later in the text. These Jewish elders were happy to come to Jesus on behalf of this centurion. It wasn't because they were threatened; they were honored to come.

A...Their Approach to Jesus

Explanation

Luke pens, "they besought him instantly" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2009, Luke. 7:4). Another way to appropriately translate this phrase is, "they begged Him insistently" (*Simplified KJV Bible Promise Book Edition*, 2023, Luke 7:4). Luke used the Greek imperfect tense meaning that he wrote about something that started and stopped at some time in the past. However, the action that started and stopped continued in the intervening period. In other words, these Jewish elders found Jesus, started beggin Him, and kept begging Him until something stopped them.

What stopped them?

Look at verse 6.

"Then Jesus went with them" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2009, Luke. 7:6).

They kept at it until Jesus responded.

We can learn from their insistence.

B...Their Appeal to Jesus

Explanation

Why would Jewish elders acquiesce to the request of a Roman centurion?

In their minds, the centurion was "worthy" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2009, Luke. 7:4).

C...Their Account to Jesus

Explanation

What made him worthy?

"For he loves our nation, and he has built us a synagogue" (*Simplified KJV Bible Promise Book Edition*, 2023, Luke 7:4).

Isn't that just like humanity?

We often struggle with the idea that God must show favor based on merit. However, God's favor is not merit-based; it is grace-based.

Illustration

I never dreamed that taking a child to Disney World could be so difficult — or that such a trip could teach me so much about God's outrageous grace.

Our middle daughter had been previously adopted by another family. I [Timothy] am sure this couple had the best of intentions, but they never quite integrated the adopted child into their family of biological children. After a couple of rough years, they dissolved the adoption, and we ended up welcoming an eight-year-old girl into our home.

For one reason or another, whenever our daughter's previous family vacationed at Disney World, they took their biological children with them, but they left their adopted daughter with a family friend. Usually — at least in the child's mind — this happened because she did something wrong that precluded her presence on the trip.

And so, by the time we adopted our daughter, she had seen many pictures of Disney World and she had heard about the rides and the characters and the parades. But when it came to passing

through the gates of the Magic Kingdom, she had always been the one left on the outside. Once I found out about this history, I made plans to take her to Disney World the next time a speaking engagement took our family to the southeastern United States.

I thought I had mastered the Disney World drill. I knew from previous experiences that the prospect of seeing cast members in freakishly oversized mouse and duck costumes somehow turns children into squirming bundles of emotional instability. What I *didn't* expect was that the prospect of visiting this dreamworld would produce a stream of downright devilish behavior in our newest daughter. In the month leading up to our trip to the Magic Kingdom, she stole food when a simple request would have gained her a snack. She lied when it would have been easier to tell the truth. She whispered insults that were carefully crafted to hurt her older sister as deeply as possible — and, as the days on the calendar moved closer to the trip, her mutinies multiplied.

A couple of days before our family headed to Florida, I pulled our daughter into my lap to talk through her latest escapade. “I know what you’re going to do,” she stated flatly. “You’re not going to take me to Disney World, are you?” The thought hadn’t actually crossed my mind, but her downward spiral suddenly started to make some sense. She knew she couldn’t earn her way into the Magic Kingdom — she had tried and failed that test several times before — so she was living in a way that placed her as far as possible from the most magical place on earth.

In retrospect, I’m embarrassed to admit that, in that moment, I was tempted to turn her fear to my own advantage. The easiest response would have been, “If you don’t start behaving better, you’re right, we won’t take you” — but, by God’s grace, I didn’t. Instead, I asked her, “Is this trip

something we're doing as a family?"

She nodded, brown eyes wide and tear-rimmed.

"Are you part of this family?"

She nodded again.

"Then you're going with us. Sure, there may be some consequences to help you remember what's right and what's wrong — but you're part of our family, and we're not leaving you behind."

I'd like to say that her behaviors grew better after that moment. They didn't. Her choices pretty much spiraled out of control at every hotel and rest stop all the way to Lake Buena Vista. Still, we headed to Disney World on the day we had promised, and it was a typical Disney day. Overpriced tickets, overpriced meals, and lots of lines, mingled with just enough manufactured magic to consider maybe going again someday.

In our hotel room that evening, a very different child emerged. She was exhausted, pensive, and a little weepy at times, but her month-long facade of rebellion had faded. When bedtime rolled around, I prayed with her, held her, and asked, "So how was your first day at Disney World?"

She closed her eyes and snuggled down into her stuffed unicorn. After a few moments, she opened her eyes ever so slightly. "Daddy," she said, "I finally got to go to Disney World. But it wasn't because I was good; it's because I'm yours."

It wasn't because I was good; it's because I'm yours.

That's the message of outrageous grace.

Outrageous grace isn't a favor you can achieve by being good; it's the gift you receive by being God's. Outrageous grace is God's goodness that comes looking for you when you have nothing but a middle finger flipped in the face of God to offer in return. It's a farmer paying a full day's wages to a crew of deadbeat day laborers with only a single hour punched on their time cards (Matthew 20:1 – 16). It's a man marrying an abandoned woman and then refusing to forsake his covenant with her when she turns out to be a whore (Ezekiel 16:8 – 63; Hosea 1:1 — 3:5). It's the insanity of a shepherd who puts ninety-nine sheep at risk to rescue the single lamb that's too stupid to stay with the flock (Luke 15:1 – 7). It's the love of a father who hands over his finest rings and robes to a young man who has squandered his inheritance on drunken binges with his fair-weather friends (Luke 15:11 – 32)...It's one-way love that calls you into the kingdom not because you've been good but because God has chosen you and made you his own. And now he is chasing you to the ends of the earth to keep you as his child, and nothing in heaven or hell can ever stop him...

But here's what's amazing about God's outrageous grace: This isn't merely what God the Father *would* do; it's what he *did* do. God could have chosen to save anyone, everyone, or no one from Adam's fallen race. But what God did was to choose a multi-hued multitude of "someones," and — if you are a believer in Jesus Christ — one of those "someones" was you. God in Christ has declared over you, "I could have chosen anyone in the whole world as my child, and I chose you. No matter what you say or do, neither my love nor my choice will ever change." That's grace that's truly amazing.

3...The Centurion's Report (vv. 6-8)

Explanation

As Jesus made His way to the centurion's house, the centurion sent more messengers to Him.

His message contains two key elements.

A...His Abasement

Explanation

The Jews declared that he was worthy.

Twice, he declared that he was not.

Notice, he did not consider himself worthy for Jesus to enter his house, but he believed Jesus was able to heal his servant. He took the right view of Jesus. The view of one who recognizes his own unworthiness, that receiving God's favor is not about our merit, but His grace.

“Your faith will not murder your humility, your humility will not stab at your faith; but the two will go hand in hand to heaven like a brave brother and a fair sister, the one bold as a lion the other meek as a dove, the one rejoicing in Jesus the other blushing at self.” (Spurgeon)

B...His Acknowledgement

Explanation

The centurion identified his understanding of authority, and applied it to Jesus. His statement acknowledges that he had authority above him, giving him authority to send others to do his bidding. In some way, he saw something similar in Jesus. He recognized that Jesus had authority to command the sickness hindering his servant - from near or from a distance.

Do you recognize and respond to the authority and power of Jesus?

You may not have authority and power over sickness, mental well-being, circumstances, or spiritual doubts and troubles, but Jesus does!

4...Jesus's Report (vv. 9-10)

Bible

(9) When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. (10) And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

Luke 7:9-10 - KJV

A...The Declaration of Faith

Explanation

Jesus recognized the centurion's words and actions as an expression of his faith in Jesus.

Remember, faith - authentic faith - will be revealed in words and actions.

Yet, notice that Jesus did not marvel that the centurion loved Israel or built a synagogue. He marveled that the man believed.

B...The Deficiency of Faith

Explanation

In like way, Jesus criticized the lack of faith among God's people.

How appalling it is when unbelievers have more faith than believers!

Conclusion

For the Christ Seeker: Understand that God does not owe you anything, but He offers you so much through His Son Jesus Christ. Believe in Him.

For the Christ Follower: Trust God, His grace and goodness, not your merit and goodness.