
Jesus and a sufferer

Luke 7:1-23

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Introduction

A significant problem we may face tonight with this 2-part series has to do with how our culture trains us to hear. The late Neil Postman, professor of communication at New York University, talked about how information is communicated through television.¹ One news story follows the former which follows the former with no logical connections between them. As a result, we hear information with no expectation of doing anything about it. We watch as hundreds of cases of Ebola in West Africa ravage human beings and then top story-lines of preseason NFL and then of Snowden able to stay in Russia and then how a mom committed suicide and then Clooney gets a marriage license and then get up to let the dogs out while checking up on Facebook. We are a culture trained through years of TV viewing to hear stories side by side in an unresponsive and non-committal way. No response is necessary for the passive spectator.

But the Bible does not communicate like this. Jesus said, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them I will show you what he is like...”² Particularly in narrative, the Bible gives us information as a form of invitation that leads to transformation. We are invited into the story line to hear, see and feel amazing things. As our discernment is shaped and our desires stoked we respond with hearts and bodies in ways that are consistent with the author’s intention. We are called upon by God to be active participants and not passive spectators in the grand story of the Bible.

Tonight we start a 2-part series called *Jesus’ Identity and Mission*. We will be confronted with Christ’s amazing authority and heart-stirring compassion – how he uses his power to demonstrate his pity. We will also notice human responses to Him – how some have confidence in Him while others are just not too sure. Tonight’s message is titled *Jesus and a sufferer*. Open your Bibles to Luke 7v1-23 as we encounter Jesus the Christ. <pray>

In v1-10 we have an episode organized in six scenes. The episode highlights something of Jesus Christ. But before we take a listen to this event, let’s get the general context of Luke 7.

Luke starts off his gospel by telling the reader what he aims to achieve in the reader.

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed

¹ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking, 1985).

² Luke 6:46f. Encircling the text for this message one finds the importance of “hearing”. See Luke 6:27,46,49; 8:8,15,21

all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.

(Luke 1:1-4 ESV)

(Discuss the implication of the purpose statement).

And so, all the teachings of Christ we hear, every episode of Christ we see in the gospel according to Luke are given us to create this sense of certainty over Jesus Christ and what following Him is to look like.

Follow with me as we take a quick glance at a basic theme Luke unfolds for the reader – the theme of hesitation over Christ’s identity.

4:16-22 “...*is not this Joseph’s son*”?

5:21 “*Who is this...*”?

6:2 “*Why are you doing what is not lawful...*”?

7:19,34,39,49 “*Are you the one who is to come*”? “*Look at him a glutton and a drunkard...*” “*who is this...*”?

Some in the Luke’s account have little to no certainty over Jesus Christ. His identity was not fully revealed. His mission was confusing to many. People just did not know Him in a way that promotes confidence in Him.

To realize this confidence in Him keep in mind that when the Bible communicates information it comes in a form of invitation that leads to transformation. We are about to encounter Jesus Christ in verses 1-10. Why does Luke record this episode for the reader? How can seeing Christ in this event cause confidence in Christ to rise up in us? As Bible listeners are to participate in the experience of an episode I invite us now to use our imagination to listen intently to the six scenes that are before us. Take a listen as I read for us v1-10.

After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. Now a 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. 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.” 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. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. 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.” 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.” And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

(Luke 7:1-10 ESV)

REVELATION

v1-17

The message can be divided up into two sections; revelation (v1-17) and response (18-23). (by revelation I simply mean unveiling something that once was veiled as a character on stage and yet behind the curtain. This story we are about to hear raises the curtain and exposes the main character of the story who has always been on stage)

Scene One – setting & characters

v1-2

In v1-2, we come to the setting and characters. Jesus just finished teaching on kingdom living. He now enters Capernaum, a town on the NW shore of the Sea of Galilee. Luke introduces for us a centurion here in Capernaum with his dying and highly valued slave. (Centurions were gentile officers in the Roman army commanding normally 100 men.) The way Luke describes him tells us that this well-known, beloved, and perhaps even a God-fearing centurion wielded much authority and yet was loved by people and loved his slave. His position of power reveals his idea of Jesus as we will soon see.

So scene one found in v1-2 communicates the setting in the northern part of Israel and characters as a gentile soldier and his beloved dying servant.

Scene two – centurion's response to Jesus

v3

Scene two found in v3 starts the action. We begin to notice how the centurion views Jesus. Under duress over his dying slave he hears about Jesus. What report he hears is not given to us. Likely it has to do with Jesus's identity and activity – one who can heal sickness and even keep people from death.

He sends Jewish elders to Jesus to request a healing visit from Jesus. He believes that Jesus can restore his servant from the brink of death. He longs for his servant to be well. And so, he calls for Jesus.

Why the centurion does not simply go to Jesus is made known later in the story. For now, however, we see a confidence in Christ that he will use his authority over sickness and compassionately heal his friend.

Scene three – Centurion's request through Elders

v4-6a

Scene three found in v4-6a shows us the elders coming to Jesus. They ask him exactly what the centurion requested them to ask. But notice how they make the request. They make the request for Jesus to come and help the centurion in a form of an argument. Notice how they make their case. First, they state that the centurion is worthy of Christ's attention. Jesus ought to come because of the worth of the centurion. Next, they supply two pieces of evidence that demonstrate his value and obligate His response. The first exhibit shows that the centurion loves the Jewish nation. The second exhibit makes clear that he had built their synagogue. The elders were amassing proof of the centurion's worthiness as the basis for Jesus granting him his request.

This is curious. Let's pause for a moment and think about the elders' view of Jesus. They do carry out the centurion's request. But they seem to think that Jesus responds to people like an employer responds to his employees. You know, since you have

done well on the job you will get a paycheck and perhaps even notoriety. It's based on a compensation system. You give what the boss requires (i.e. obedience) and the boss is obligated to give you your wages. Is this how we are to view Jesus. Is this how He uses His power for His people? What do we see Jesus do? The text simply says that Jesus went with them.

Scene four – Centurion's correction of Elders' request **v6b-8**

Scene four found in v6b-8 opens with Jesus close to the centurion's home. Before they got to the house, the centurion sent more messengers to Jesus with a specific message. The essence of the message still had the request for healing in it. But note the correction to the elders' message. The centurion adjusted his moral record. In v4 the Elders said that he was worthy. And now in v6 the centurion says he is not worthy of Jesus' presence and power and pity. To make his case he goes on to talk about how he understands superior / subordinate relationships. His point seems to both demonstrate his awareness of Jesus' authority and his humble trust in him. The centurion knows his position in reference to Jesus. He is under Jesus. He is submissive to Jesus. He knows something of his authority. He simply asks that Jesus say the word and his servant will be healed.

Scene five – Jesus marvels **v9**

Scene five, v.9, shows Jesus marveling. This verse is striking. There are only two places in the whole Bible (I think) that we hear of Jesus marveling at a person. Here in this verse it is over a type of faith he sees and in Mark 6:6 Jesus marvels over a lack of faith. He admires the centurion's bold, humble faith saying that there is not this type of faith anywhere in Israel.

Scene six – Jesus on display **v10**

Scene six, v10, rounds off the story by showing the results of Jesus' authoritative compassion for the centurion and his slave. Christ's unimaginable and sheer power is on display in this verse. The text leads the reader to conclude that Jesus just spoke the word and the slave was healed. In fact, since the text does not say he spoke the word which was the request in v7, perhaps Jesus simply thought the word of healing and the miracle happened. When the messengers came to the centurion's house they found the servant well.

If we were to move into the next episode found in v11-17 about Jesus raising the widow's son from death we would come away with thoughts about Jesus' identity and mission similar to what we just witnessed in v1-10.

Jesus uses His unrestricted authority to alleviate misery as a sign that the kingdom of God is here. Repent of unbelief and turn to Him. He is the fullness of Isaiah's vision of the Messiah and His kingly reign. Jesus is on display in these two stories as the long-awaited Messiah.

Some Implications

So there's the basic story of Jesus healing a centurion's servant. We've briefly walked through the short story noticing Jesus' identity and mission.

According to Luke 4:18ff, Jesus saw himself as the fulfiller of Isaiah's vision of the long-awaited Messiah. People asked, "Who is Jesus and what is he up to"? They were confused over his identity. They were confused over his mission.

Jesus is revealed here as the messiah prophesied by Isaiah to bring in his messianic kingdom; a kingdom that destroys the enemies of God's people and leads them into the joy and freedom from the curse of this fallen world. He is rolling back all pain and tears and fears and death and disease and corruption and Satan and destruction. He is taking it all away and bringing in joy and hope and love and peace within community – restoring bodies and relationships and bringing them into a perfect place – paradise regained.

This is Jesus on display!

So here's my question. How can we, some 2000 yrs. after this occasion, enter into this story? How can we experience what we just read? What are we to understand from this story? When are we to experience the fullness of this expression? How are we to live life today in the light of this story?

It seems clear that the main point of the story has to do with Jesus' identity and mission as well as the response of faith of a gentile. If we broaden our angle on Jesus we notice his healings and teachings span from 4v38 – 7v23.

Jesus' identity and mission

This larger text gives us a summary of Jesus' compassionate healing power. If we widen the scope a bit more we come to 4v14 and notice the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. It is said to take place in Galilee and it is a fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction of who the long-awaited messiah is to be. Take a listen to how Isaiah in 730BC saw the effects of the messiah on his people.

Isa.26:19 – "your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise"

Isa.29:18 – "in that day the deaf shall hear the words of a book and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind shall see. The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the Lord and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel"

Isa.35:5ff – "then shall the lame man leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water"

Isa.61:1- "the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor..."

If we enlarge the picture even more we see in 3:6 & Acts 1:8 that his mission spreads across the entire world. And that Jesus' genealogy beginning in 3:23 takes us clear back to Adam who we may recall had a mandate by God to "to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over all". But this mission was aborted through Adam's rebellion. Now due

to sin the world is not an extended Garden of Eden. Rather it is filled with selfishness and murder; disasters and pollution; rape and deception; blindness and brokenness and a hopelessness to face of the all-terrifying impending judgment of God. How can any of us live in peace and uprightness in this fallen condition?

Jesus the Christ has come. Jesus the Christ has won. He fulfilled flawlessly the mandate given to Adam. He fulfilled the Abrahamic covenant as the perfect and provided son. He fulfilled the Davidic kingship and the law with its sacrificial rites so that the guilty can go free and be protected by the King.

He died on the cross for all who put their hope in Him. He was raised from the dead to usher in the new creation in which the entire vision of Isaiah will be finally and ultimately realized. Perfect peace. Perfect paradise. Perfect bodies. Perfect relationships – All this in the presence of the Perfect King; Jesus Christ our Lord.

This beloved awaits all who have the kind of faith we see from this gentile centurion.

RESPONSE

v18-23

But there's a problem we all face. And we see this difficulty in v18-23.

Our time doesn't permit us to comb through this paragraph. I'll simply read the paragraph and draw our attention to the point of it. We then will end this message with application to our lives

*The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" And when the men had come to him, they said, "John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?'" In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And **blessed is the one who is not offended by me.**"*

(Luke 7:18-23 ESV)

How have you been hearing this message tonight? What will be your response to Jesus Christ's authority and compassion – the fulfiller of Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah?

In this chapter we notice three kinds of faith; three categories if you will of responses to Jesus.

Mixed faith response

The Elders of the Jews came to Jesus on behalf of the Centurion to request help. This is an interesting group. They appear to love the centurion. They appear to be go-to people for the centurion. Luke doesn't call them Pharisees. Perhaps this group inclines to the Old Testament with their hearts and is awaiting the Christ of the OT. But their faith is mixed with worldly a way of getting things. They submitted their request as an argument of sorts. They stated the request. But then they followed it up giving evidence for why Jesus should comply with the request. We said of this approach to be one similar to Employer/Employee relationship. It is a mechanistic, you own because I've done kind of approach. Short-hand we call this a legalistic way of approaching Jesus.

Category One will be spoken of here as mixed faith response. (preach to this group)

Maxed faith response

The second response we come to in this story is seen in the Gentile centurion. He is the one who is praised for his faith. He is characterized as humble, submissive and bold. He asked Christ specifically for what only Christ can do. He knows him to be one of supreme authority and yet supreme compassion. His heart is distressed over his dear friend. And he knows his only hope is in Jesus. He knows he can perform miracles from afar. All he needs to do is speak the word. This is undaunted faith in the Christ.

Category Two will be spoken of here as maxed faith response. (preach to this group)

Mixed Up faith response

And now we come to the final response; one that a great prophet possessed. In v18-23 we listen to John the Baptist in prison. He believes in Jesus. He believes that Jesus is the Christ; for he preached in the wilderness that he is so. But now he's facing much suffering. He is facing impending doom. He may not know it now but in the near future he will have his head cut off in a brutal and torturous fashion. He knows of Jesus identity...doesn't he? He knows of Jesus' supreme authority...doesn't he? He knows of His matchless mercy...doesn't he? So would Jesus leave his cousin, his dear friend and companion in the ministry to brutally be killed in prison? He is the messiah who is to come and deliver his people from all suffering. He is the One who comes to release prisoners from the dungeons and deliver them to safety. John amid suffering suffers from mixed up faith. He needs to think upon the

whole counsel of God. God's plan never has changed. All His promises are yes in Jesus Christ. And all these promises are fulfilled the first coming of Jesus Christ. And yet, they are not fully realized by His people until the second coming of Jesus Christ. In verse 23 we hear Jesus say, "blessed is the one who is not offended by Me". Interpreted means, "happy and stable is the one who trusts in God's plan to start it with me first coming (death/burial/resurrection) and then complete it with my second coming (complete obliteration of evil and a complete transformation of the world with his people populating the world in perfect, glorified bodies with full and unending access to Jesus Christ as their crown of joy. Never-ending & ever-increasing rapturous gladness in paradise.

Category three will be spoken of here as Mixed Up Faith Response. (preach to this group)

In the last forty minutes through Luke 7 Christ has been revealed as:

The long-awaited Messiah in all his authority and compassion...

But we've seen a tendency in how to respond to him:

The tendency to relate to God in a legalistic way...

The tendency to lose sight of the grand story in the midst of great suffering...

Oh beloved simply trust Him and take Him simply at His word.

This leads to...

Courage and hope amid trials and despair

Living by faith in God's grace and not under law by works

Knowing that what Christ started Christ completes

This beloved is the gospel.