**The Gospel of Luke**

**Lesson 16** Luke 7:1-17 The Faith of the Centurion!

**Questions:**

1. What important truth did you learn from the lecture and how does it apply to your life?
2. Read Wiersbe pages 89-93.

Why was the centurion’s faith so remarkable? What evidence about Jesus do we have that he did not? What should you do if you are struggling in your faith?

What does it mean that Jesus is the Son of God (Luke 1:35, Matt. 26:63, John 19:7, and Heb. 1:3)?

1. Read Luke 7:1-10 along with Mathew 8:5-13. Real Biblical Faith!

According to Kent Hughes:

Professional mountain climber Royal Robbins, writing for *Sports Illustrated*, described   
the one great essential of the sport. It is not physical strength or having the safest and   
best equipment, or even proper training, but the ability to see things as they really are. Robbins writes:

*If we are keenly alert and aware of the rock and what we are doing on it, if we are honest with ourselves and our capabilities and weaknesses, if we avoid committing ourselves beyond what we know is safe, then we will climb safely. For climbing is an exercise in reality. He who sees it clearly is on safe ground, regardless of his experience or skill.   
But he who sees reality as he would like it to be, may have his illusions rudely stripped from his eyes when the ground comes up fast.*

Actually, mountain climber Robbins has given masterful expression to a crucial life principle. Wise people resist seeing life as they would like to see it. They are honest with themselves regarding their capabilities and weaknesses.

This universal principle applies to every area of life. But nowhere is it more essential   
than in matters of faith, because *real faith is an exercise in reality*. The present text   
about a centurion’s faith takes us inside true faith and shows us how and what faith sees.   
It presents us with the flawed perspective of the centurion’s friends (vv. 3-5), then the enlightened perspective of the centurion himself (vv. 6, 7a), and finally Jesus’ divine perspective (vv. 7b-10).[[1]](#endnote-1)

Jesus had just entered Capernaum after the naming of the Twelve and his sermon   
on the plain, which ended by telling his listeners to put into practice what they had learned. According to verse 2, who was very sick?

According to The NIV Study Bible commentary:

The centurion was probably a member of Herod Antipas’ force, which were organized in Roman fashion, ordinarily in companies of 100 men. Roman centurions referred to in the NT showed characteristics to be admired (e.g., Act 10:2; 23:17-18; 27-43). This centurion showed genuine concern for his slave, and he was admired by the Jews, who spoke favorably of him even though he was a Gentile (see vv. 5, 9).[[2]](#endnote-2)

Verse 4 states, “This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.”

1. How does this reflect the flawed perspective these servants had about their master, the centurion?
2. Do many religious people have a similar flawed perspective concerning their salvation? If yes, how so?

The elders had it right. The centurion was certainly a lover of Israel and a benefactor of her people. But their insistence that he was “worthy” to have Jesus heal his servant was their own spin. It certainly was not his (cf. vv. 6, 7). The elders were understandably generous in their assessment. But their rationale was patently *external*— “He loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue”—not *internal*, “He is humble and meek and godly.” They lauded the centurion for the kind of works with which people today think they can earn Heaven. Build a Gothic cathedral, solicit public donations with a promise that donor’s names will appear on a published subscribers list, and the money will roll in. The Bible, in both Testaments, teaches that a plea of worthiness is totally unsustainable before God.

The elders presented such a surface argument for Jesus’ involvement because that was the way they were accustomed to analyzing their own lives—by externals. Unfortunately, in spiritual matters seeing falsely is worse than being blind. The blind at least know they cannot see. But the surface seer thinks he sees.

Before the seventeenth century, when people looked at a lake or a pond or a glass of water, they judged it clean if they could see through it. But in 1674 the Dutchman Leeuwenhoek filled a glass vial with water, began curiously looking at it through his newly acquired microscope lens, and saw, as he quaintly put it, “very many small animalcules.” He then examined a drop of water and jotted down his findings:

*I now saw very plainly that these were little eels, or worms, lying all huddled up together and wriggling; just as if you saw, with the naked eye, a whole tubful of very little eels and water, with the eels a-squirming among one another; and the whole water seemed to be alive with these multifarious animalcules.*[[3]](#endnote-3)

When we turn the magnifying glass of God’s Word onto what is inside us, we find a whole universe of squirming critters and realize our own unworthiness. As a prophet said six hundred years before Jesus, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick: who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).[[4]](#endnote-4)

1. What do you learn about the so-called righteousness of mankind from the following verses?

* Isaiah 64:6
* Romans 3:10-20, 23

1. What has been your response to the word of God as it reveals your sins   
   (Jas. 1:21-25)?
2. Read Ephesians 2:8-9. What do you learn from these two very important verses concerning one’s salvation?
3. Focus on verses 6-10.

* What traits do you see in the centurion that are pleasing to God?
* Define biblical faith by the following texts:

John 20:29

Hebrews 11:1

Hebrews 11:8-10

* How was the centurion’s faith rewarded?

Re-read Mathew 7:13-14 and 8:5-13. Jesus essentially describes the only two possible destinies for every man, woman and child who has been born. Explain these two possible destinies from the phrases below:

1. “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”

* To what feast is Jesus referring (Isa. 25:8-9; Rev. 19:6-10)?
* Which gate must you enter and which road must you travel if you want to be invited to this feast (The Wedding Supper of the Lamb)?

1. “But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness,   
   where there will be weeing and gnashing of teeth.”

* Who are the subjects of the kingdom?

Being a physical descendant of Abraham was a great privilege and advantage (Romans 3:1-2), but in spite of what most jews believed, it did not guarantee salvation. It is the children of Abraham’s spiritual faith, not the children of his physical body whom God adopts as His own children (Romams 8:14-17; Galatians 3:7-9, 26-29; cf. Romans 4:11, 16). Those who reject Christ, even though they are physical descendants of Abraham, will have no place **at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.** By their rejection of the Son of God—especially in light of the irrefutable evidence of His miracles—they prove they are really sons of Satan (John 8:42-44). Because they are false **sons of the kingdom**, they annul the divine promise, forfeit the divine blessing, and are forever barred from the divine **kingdom**. That was the substance of Jesus’ brief but sobering message to   
the unbelieving Jews just before He pronounced the healing of the centurion’s slave.[[5]](#endnote-5)

* To what judgment is Jesus referring (Rev. 20:11-15)?
* Which gate must you turn away from, and which road must you exit if you want to avoid the Great White Throne Judgment?
* On which road are most people traveling? What is your responsibility towards those on the wide road (Matt. 28:18-20)?

1. How does one enter through the narrow gate (Rom. 10:9-10, 13)?

Faith is an exercise in reality. He who sees clearly, and not merely as he would like to see,   
is on safe ground.

Do you see yourself as deserving Christ’s grace, as the elders saw the centurion? Do you inwardly think that because you are a lover of the church, and even more, a giver of your money you are worthy of God’s care? Have you secretly internalized other’s good opinions of yourself, so that despite the persistent teaching of God’s Word that salvation comes through faith and is a gift of God, you imagine that you will somehow make it into the kingdom by your personal virtue? Do you see Christians who glibly talk about their salvation but do not measure up in their walk, and then reason that because your life is better than theirs, you certainly will make it to Heaven?

If so, you are not seeing reality. You must face the truth—apart from the grace of God, y  
our heart is desperately evil. Self is at the center of your universe, and therefore darkness reigns within. The reality is that you, like the centurion, are not worthy. No one is. All your acts of supposed righteousness will not cut it with God, Your only hope is the love and grace of Christ![[6]](#endnote-6)

1. Read Luke 7:11-17. Jesus Raises a Widow’s Son!

Death was never supposed to be part of life! It was never God’s plan! However, with the rebellion that occurred in the garden (Genesis 2:15-17; 3; Romans 5:12), death entered our world. Sadly, as with the death of a child, death comes much earlier for some than it should, and it is particularly painful for the parents who must live with such great loss. What a burden many have to bear? A parent should never have to bury a child. Unfortunately, death is no respecter of age. Here in Luke 7, Jesus encounters a grieving widow who is preparing   
to bury her son.

What was the Lord’s inward response when he saw the grieving mother?

*Jesus’ Compassion* (v. 13)

As the bereaved woman stumbled toward the burial ground, she had no hint of the miracle awaiting her.

*Jesus’ Heart*

“And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her (v. 13). Jesus’ heart went out to her in unmitigated compassion. Luke uses the strongest word possible here to describe Jesus’ pity. The root word from which it comes refers to what is inside (the heart, liver, lungs), the viscera.[[7]](#endnote-7) It describes an emotion that has a physical effect. Jesus felt for her.

We should note that this was typical of Jesus. Later, at a similar occasion, when Jesus observed Mary and Martha weeping for Lazarus, “he was deeply moved in his spirit   
and greatly troubled” (John 11:33). The word translated “was deeply moved” comes   
from an ancient word describing a horse’s snorting.[[8]](#endnote-8) It indicates that the Lord let out   
n involuntary gasp—the breath just went out of him. E.V. Rieu comments, “He gave way to such distress of spirit as made his body tremble.” Jesus felt for the two sisters so much that he had a physical reaction. And his convulsive feeling gave way to tears (v. 35). When he saw the widow of Nain, Jesus was again inwardly convulsed with compassion.[[9]](#endnote-9)

What action did Jesus take and what was the result?

*Jesus Raises the Dead!* (vv. 14, 15)

Touch a coffin meant sure pollution according to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament (cf. Numbers 19:11, 16), but Jesus knew hat the Law required mercy above sacrifice (cf. Hosea 6:6). So, Jesus took charge: “Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still\” (v. 14a). His silent touch stopped everything, forcing a riveting silence. Life and death stood face-to-face. The scene was parabolic of Jesus’ mission to arrest death and swallow it up in victory (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54, 55).

*The Command*

The silence was broken by Jesus’ simple command, “Young man, I say to you, arise”   
(v. 14b). Significantly, when performing lesser miracles Jesus wou8ld sometime enjoin specific actions along with the healing. The actions were spiritually instructive. But when it came to resurrections, he used only his word (cf. Mark 5:41; Luke 8:54; John 11:43). Clearly, he waned everyone to see that resurrection power rests in him!

Notice too that when he spoke to the boy’s cold corpse, the boy heard him. The young man was dead in body, but he was fully alive somewhere! For we humans, death is only death of the body. The human spirit lives on.[[10]](#endnote-10)

1. What words did Jesus (God) speak in the following texts:

Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 14

Mark 5:41

Luke 8:54

John 11:43

1. What do you learn from these about the Word of God and from the   
   following texts?

John 6:63b

Hebrews 4:12

1. How is faith born in a man according to Romans 10:17? Why should all men   
   be in a Bible study?

What was the response of the people?

Who did the people think Jesus was? Do you think they had genuine biblical   
faith yet?

What do you learn about the heart of God from this story?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11. List several truths you learn from this passage?

*Awesome Compassion*

There are grieving souls who mourn not only death but the loss of a relationship. There are rejected men, women, and children who feel worthless. There are the betrayed who are so wounded they fear they can never trust again. There are the depressed for whom   
a singly positive thought is an impossibility.

The hurts and failures of this world are burdens that cannot be borne by anyone except Jesus. But he hears of the pain of very voice, and his heart goes out to us, his children, with deep compassion. Are you afflicted and hurting? Jesus hurts with you.

*Awesome Power*

Not only does he have awesome compassion—he has awesome power to minister to   
our deepest needs. All he has to do is say “Get up!” and all the dead will rise. The same power is available for us in every trial we encounter.

Further, his power is mediated by his wisdom. He will not do everything we ask, but   
he will do what is best for our well-being and for his glory. He will bring his mercy and compassion to bear on the points of pain and need in our lives. He will bring healing.   
He will bring life.

“Fear all seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has arisen among us!’ and God has visited his people!’” (v. 16).

God has come to help us! Amen![[11]](#endnote-11)

Perhaps you are burdened by the loss of a child or by the loss of a parent or friend.   
In Matthew 11:28-30 Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,   
and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle   
and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and   
my burden if light.”

Are you carrying a heavy burden of some sort? Have you truly come to Jesus so that   
He might carry that burden for you? If not, why not come to Him now?

1. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 261. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Kenneth Barker, General Editor, *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 1551. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Daniel J. Boorstin, 1983, as qtd. in, Hughes, 263. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Hughes, 263. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. John MacArthur, Jr. *The McArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 8-15* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 14-15. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Hughes, 267. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. G. Abbott-Smith quoted in Hughes, 270. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Daniel J. Boorstin quoted in Hughes, 271. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Hughes, 270-271. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Hughes, 271-272. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Hughes, 274. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)