

# LUKE

“The Boundary Breaking Love and Power of Christ”

*Luke 7:1-10*

Sunday, January 7, 2018

By David A. Ritchie

<sup>1</sup> After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup> Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. <sup>3</sup> When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. <sup>4</sup> And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, <sup>5</sup> for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.” <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. <sup>8</sup> 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.” <sup>9</sup> 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.” <sup>10</sup> And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well. <sup>1</sup>

*Heavenly Father, for centuries, your chosen people hoped and waited for the coming of a Messiah. We praise you that you sent your son Jesus to be that Messiah for the Jewish people, but even more, we praise you that this same Jesus is the savior of all nations and all peoples for all of time. We pray now this morning that your Holy Spirit who inspired your Holy Scriptures to be written would now illuminate our hearts so that glory of Christ would shine in and through our lives. We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus, AMEN.*

## I. Introduction

- Today is the last day of my oldest son’s first real Christmas break. Tomorrow he goes back to Kindergarten, and our family’s life will violently snap back into the rhythm of normal. But I’m so thankful for these last few weeks, and for the Christmas holiday. For the Ritchie family this was the first Christmas during which all three of our little boys were old enough to look forward to Christmas with anticipation, but one in which they were also all still young enough for Christmas to be magical.
- I can still remember what it was like to yearn for Christmas day to come, so that I could wake up and open presents under my family’s Christmas tree. But because of these great expectations, I can also remember my first real Christmas disappointment, when my expectation was far greater than the reality when it finally came.
- The reason for this disappointment was that I had a very set expectation on what I wanted that year. I was in the first or second grade and that year the Sega Game Gear was released. And the Game Gear was the first handheld, portable gaming system that had ever been built that was

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 7:1–10.

also in full color. And this was what I wanted. I thought about how awesome it would be to play Sonic the Hedgehog anywhere I went; in the car, at my grandparent's house, while my mom was shopping at the store.

- So Christmas morning came and my mom and dad had heard my pleas for a Game Gear, and they bought me a Game Gear. I was so excited to play. So my dad opened the box and put in six double-A batteries, and I began to play. And it was great! But it was short-lived. In less than an hour, it just turned off, right while I was in the middle of conquering a level no less. This made me upset, but turned it back on. However, in five minutes it was off again. I started to cry because I thought it was broken. My dad, however, realized the batteries were already dead. He changed them out, but in an hour the same thing happened.
- He said, "Look buddy, you're going to have to use the AC adapter and plug your Game Gear into the wall. If this thing eats up batteries this quickly there is no way we can afford that many batteries." So instead of having this awesome full-color, portable gaming system, I had a very stationary gaming system with a very small screen. My expectation was far greater than the reality.
- But there are wonderful times in when life surprises you with a reality that is greater than the expectations (Kate, Redeemer).
- The coming of Jesus is the best example in history of the reality being so much different, but so much better than the expectation.
- The Jewish people had a dead set expectation of what the messiah would have to look like.
- The messiah would bring about a vision of salvation that was exclusively materialistic and nationalist. But, in Jesus, God was up to something much more
- Jesus would not only become the Jewish messiah, but the savior of the nations. He would not only be the king of the Jews, he would be the king of all kings.
- *The reality would be better than the expectation.*
- We take for granted how much of a ground shaking idea this was.
- This truth that Gentile believers could by faith become fellow partakers of the promises that God made to Israel was so profound that the Apostle Paul often called it the "mystery of the Gospel" that had been hidden for ages, but now revealed.
- *"For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Ephesians 3:1–6, ESV).*
- The season of Epiphany, which began yesterday, is a season on the church calendar that celebrates that Christ has been revealed to the nations. The ancient church felt it was a truth that needed to be celebrated and marveled at every year.
- This was a theme that Luke as a Gentile author cared for deeply; gentiles get to be a part of God's people too.
- For the first century Jews, Jesus was different than what they expected, but better than anyone thought possible.
- For us too, Jesus maybe different than what we expect, but so much better than we could ever

imagine.

- But will we give him the opportunity to surprise us?
- In this text, we will see the expectation shattering, paradigm changing, boundary breaking love of Christ and the power of Christ.

## II. Text

### **1.) The Boundary Breaking Love of Christ.**

- Jesus is growing in popularity as a prophet, teacher, and miracle worker. He has also been attracting a lot of criticism from religious leaders.
- He has just finished preaching the famous Sermon on the Mount (or plain in Luke). But who will embody what it means to be poor in spirit, hungry for righteousness, and meek?
- Not a Pharisee, a religious leader, or even a Jew, but rather a gentile centurion (probably of a member Herod Antipas's military force<sup>2</sup>).
- This mans seems to be a genuinely kind and loving man, who loves his servant like a son; the servant is “highly valued” and “precious” (ἔντιμος) to him.<sup>3</sup>
- The gospel according to Matthew (8:4) describes the same servant as “paralyzed and in terrible suffering.”<sup>4</sup>
- Such a good man that even the Jewish elders are willing to plead his cause, because he so much respect for the Jewish law and love for the Jewish people.
- Stein: “I do not deserve.” This could involve either a sense of “unworthiness” or “uncleanness.”<sup>5</sup>
- Jesus is going to shatter a paradigm of who God is able to love and give favor and grace.
- The Jewish mindset is “our resume earns us privileges and favors from God.”
- Jesus will answer the prayer of the centurion, not because of the centurion's goodness, but because of his grace.
- ***Jesus loves us not because we are good, but because he is good.***
- This love of Christ is capable of breaking down a racial wall that stood for centuries.
- ***“Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:11–14, ESV).***

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<sup>2</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 279.

<sup>3</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 619.

<sup>4</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 218.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 219.

- *The love of Christ breaks pre-established paradigms and shatters expectations of what we would naturally thing to be possible and proper.*
- Two implications. First: When we are in need, when we are dirty, when we need help, do we believe the love of God can reach us?
- We will find freedom when we begin to believe the love of God is greater than our greatest sin.
- Now he loves us too much to leave us in our sin, but he's not afraid to meet us when we are not worthy of him
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- Second implication: is this the version of Jesus that the church – as the body of Christ – presents to the world?
- Dr. Darrell Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary: *“Jesus does not refuse the man because he is of a different race. Do we have such exclusionary clauses in our ministries? Jesus does not worry about class. Do we make such distinctions in targeting those to whom we will minister? Neither does Jesus argue for a type of separationism that says the centurion is not among God’s people, so he cannot receive ministry. Sometimes we underestimate the power of the testimony of the gospel to cross ethnic, social, or even lines of belief. Sometimes the way a person is drawn to God is through the indication that God can cross such boundaries to touch and change a heart.”*<sup>6</sup>
- We are called as the body of Christ to exude a love that breaks down walls that divide the rest of the world; to embody a different way of being human.
- Do we love the broken and the unworthy? Or do we only love those that look like us, vote like us, think like us?
- The boundary breaking love of Christ is a counterintuitive force that the world finds ridiculous and weak, but it is able to change the tide of nations and history.
- The Roman Empire is gone, but the Church endures.

## **2.) The Boundary Breaking Power of Christ.**

- The Jews had a limited number of boxes to put Jesus in.
- At this point, Jesus looked like a prophet, which would have been a big deal by itself.
- Prophets were able to move in great power, but typically they had to be present for a miracle, or else there had to be some physical action performed (think Elisha’s bones in the cave).
- But this paradigm limits the true capacity of Jesus.
- The gentile centurion has another paradigm – a military chain of command.
- Marshall: “The centurion knows that Jesus can heal simply by a command, for he also (καὶ γὰρ ἐγώ) is a person who is under authority and can use his delegated authority to give orders that others must obey; so Jesus being under the authority of God can give orders to others.”<sup>7</sup>
- The centurion understands the way authority needs to work in order to have sovereignty over an entire region of the world.
- He is a man under authority, and a man with authority.
- He understands authority because he is under it.

<sup>6</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 205.

<sup>7</sup> Marshall, 281–282.

- He possesses authority because he is under it. He represents the full force of his king.
- Jesus is one who is sent by God, therefore he possess the power of the Almighty. Jesus can give orders and creation must obey.
- The centurion requests, “Just say the word.”
- Jesus is a prophet, but he is so much more. He is embodiment of the God who in Gen. 1 said let there be light and there was light
- His words possess more megatons of power than the sun. A long distance healing is no issue for him.
- The most surprising thing about this text is that Jesus is surprised.<sup>8</sup>
- What makes Jesus marvel is the faith of the gentile centurion
- Faith is not wishing. Faith comes from the word (cf. Rom. 10:17).
- Are we storing the word in our heart so that it shapes our reality?
- Faith is knowing, believing, and trusting.
- Faith is trusting the love and power of Christ.
- Who get to be a part of the people of God?
- By faith gentiles become true children of Abraham and the a part of the people of God.
- *“Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7, ESV).*
- Do you pray like this?
- Wright: “Of course, sometimes we ask for something and the answer is No. God reserves the right to give that answer. But this story shows that we should have no hesitation in asking.”<sup>9</sup>
- Have you submitted to the authority of Christ?
- We are allergic to authority as Americans and West Texans. But it is only when we understand and submit to the authority of God that we can experience his power.
- His power is only a problem if he is not good.
- When we come before the throne of God in prayer, we do not come before a throne that require a resume of good deeds.
- We do not come before a throne of performance. We come before a throne of grace (cf. Heb. 4:16). We come on the basis of we Jesus has done for us – his perfect life, his substitutionary death, his triumphant resurrection. All we bring to the table are the empty hands of faith. But that faith is enough to unleash the love and power of the infinite God!
- May we know, believe, and rest in the grace and power of Christ that breaks boundaries, changes paradigms, and shatters expectations. May we trust our savior who reality is greater than our greatest expectations. AMEN.

### **Community Group Discussion Questions**

- 1) *In Luke 7:1-10 Jesus’s compassion and mercy extends outside of the Jewish people and to the life of a Gentile centurion. This is significant, because during this time, there was a racial*

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<sup>8</sup> Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 80–81.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

- boundary between Jews and Gentiles (see Eph. 2:11-22). But the gospel teaches us that Christ's love breaks down that barrier. When you pursue Jesus, do you feel a sense of confidence in his love? Why or why not? How can we build our faith in the love of Christ?
- 2) As the body of Christ, what are some ways can we display and present the surprising and surpassing love of Christ to the world?
  - 3) The centurion possessed a faith in the authority and power of Jesus that made Jesus marvel. When you pursue Jesus, do you feel a sense of confidence in his power? Why or why not? How can we build our faith in the power of Christ?
  - 4) As we begin a new year, what would it look like to make this a year in which your faith in Christ grows?