

When reading Luke 7:1-10 it is good to keep in mind that the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are two companion volumes that deal with the same issues. Both Luke and Acts highlight God's plan and explain how Jew and Gentile can be equal members of the family of God. They answer the question of why the Jewish nation, which was the most natural audience for the gospel message, responded so negatively while the Gentiles responded positively. They also explain what it means to respond to Jesus; that is, they tell us what is required to believe, and how one should live as a disciple of Christ.

Luke 7:1–10 adheres tightly to these bigger themes, for it is a story about a Gentile who enters the kingdom of God; it no doubt reassured Theophilus (Lk. 1:4) that Gentiles are part of God's new spiritual community.

7:1 When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum.

7:2 And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die.

7:3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave.

7:4 When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him;

7: 5 for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue."

This story about Jesus ministering to a Gentile would be an encouragement to the Gentiles. The same story is in Matthew 8, but Matthew leaves out the details that aren't essential to his purposes. For example, Matthew says that the centurion asked Jesus; Luke, however, tells us how he asked Him. He didn't actually speak to Jesus directly, but "He sent some Jewish elders asking Jesus to come and save the life of his slave" (Lk. 7:3). What a man does through others may be said to be done by him. (For example, I might say, "I built our room addition in 2015" when in reality, "I" never even touched a nail; in actuality, carpenters built the addition. However, what I did through others can be attributed to me.) Matthew was primarily concerned about the centurion's faith and nationality, and the messengers were a distraction to this point (they blurred the racial distinctions that Matthew wanted to emphasize – Carson, Matthew, 200). Luke was interested in the man's character and humility, so the messengers were a vital part of the story (Morris, 151). Luke placed this story here and wrote it as he did for a very specific reason; it puts flesh on the sermon that Jesus had just preached in chapter 6.

Jesus had finished His sermon (Lk. 6) and entered Capernaum (7:1). There He was met with the need of a centurion whose slave had become seriously ill. Matthew tells us that his slave was paralyzed; Luke adds that he was at the point of death.

Capernaum was the main city on the north shore of the Lake of Galilee. It was a bustling, busy city that sloped down to the water where fisherman plied their trade and the fishing industry thrived and it was surrounded by beautiful hills that were used for agriculture. Capernaum was exposed to Jesus' teaching, example, and power on a regular basis, for it was His headquarters during His Galilean ministry; nevertheless, the people there were hard in heart. Jesus said in Matthew 11:23-24, "you, Capernaum,

will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless, I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment, than for you."

A centurion was a Roman officer who served with the forces of Herod Antipas, a non-Jew who ruled the precious Promised Land and was loathed by the Jewish population. Centurions were originally in charge of 100 men; however, the actual number varied. Normally, Jews hated anyone who was non-Jewish and centurions were no exception since they enforced Roman law, including taxation and the worship of pagan deities.

This centurion had heard about the healing powers of Jesus and that He had entered Capernaum, so he immediately sent messengers to Him requesting that Jesus come and heal his sick slave.

It is surprising that a Roman would send Jewish elders; however, the relationship that he had to the Jews in Capernaum is clear in verses 4 and 5. The elders saw him as someone worthy of Jesus' help for he had shown goodwill toward the nation and supported their worship by building the synagogue. What is important to see is that the normal animosity between the centurion and the Jews was not there. The elders did not go to Jesus because they feared the ramifications if they refused, nor did they just ask Jesus for help. To the contrary, they begged Him to heal the man's slave for they thought he deserved help.

7:6 Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof;

7:7 for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

7:8 "For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."

7:9 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith."

Jesus responded to the request and went with them; however, before He got to the house, He was met by messengers who stopped Him. The emphasis is on the centurion's humility. He had asked the Jewish elders to be his advocates because he didn't feel worthy enough to go himself (7:7); then, for the same reason, he did not want Jesus to enter his house (7:6).

Furthermore, he did not see it necessary for Jesus to be there in person in order to affect a cure. All that was necessary was that Jesus say a word.

The centurion related how he understood Jesus' authority by his own experiences as an authority. He could say, "Go" or "Come" or "Do this," and he knew that in each case his word would be obeyed whether he was present or not. In the same way, He believed that the words of Jesus were utterly

authoritative; what He said would happen. He believed that Jesus had the authority to grant his servant life, and if He just spoke, what He said would come to pass. When Jesus heard this He marveled (7:9).

The word “marvel” means to be amazed or astonished. It is a word that is often used of Jesus. When Jesus stilled a storm the disciples were amazed. They pondered, “*What kind of man is this* that even the winds and the waves obey Him?” (Mk. 4:41) When Jesus cast out a demon who had made a man mute, the multitudes *were amazed* and they said, “Nothing like this was ever seen in Israel” (Matt. 9:33). In Matthew 15 it says, “Great multitudes came to Him bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, dumb, and many others.” When Jesus healed them “the *multitude was amazed.*” In Luke 4:22 the people *were amazed* at Jesus’ gracious words. Luke doesn’t record the people’s response at the end of Jesus’ sermon in Luke 6, but Matthew said, “The multitudes *were amazed* at His teaching” (Matt. 7:28).

Throughout the NT people were amazed at Jesus, but only twice in the Bible does it say that Jesus was amazed; here, in relationship to the centurion’s faith, and in Mark 6:6 in relation to the unbelief in Nazareth.

The centurion was the *only* person spoken of who amazed Jesus in a positive way, but what specifically was it about the centurion that astonished Jesus?

First, we need to remember that what Luke tells us about the centurion happened immediately *after* Jesus’ sermon in Luke 6. Luke 7:1 says, “When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people (that is, when he had finished the sermon recorded in Luke 6), He went to Capernaum.” There was no interval between the two events because the Sermon on the Mount and the story of the centurion are intended to be read together; the centurion exemplifies what Jesus had just taught. In Luke 6 Jesus told us what true discipleship looks like. Then immediately in Chapter 7 we have a living, breathing example of a true disciple. Everything that Jesus was talking about in the sermon that marked out a true believer was alive in this man.

Every reason for the Jews to hate the centurion was in place. He represented a pagan nation who had subjugated Israel, taxed them, and introduced the worship of false gods. Yet, when we read the story in Luke 7 we find that the Jews considered him a worthy man, a man who *loved* them (7:5: “he loves our nation”). Jesus had just preached that a true disciple loves his enemies (cf. Lk. 6:32-35), and this man did just that; he had won the Jews’ favor and their affection (cf. Lk. 6:38). He was a man with compassion toward others (7:2, 3; cf. Lk. 6:31). Likewise, Jesus had said, “do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return” (Lk. 6:35), and “Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return” (Lk. 6:38). The centurion displayed this through his building of their synagogue. Furthermore, he was a man who was humble (cf. Lk. 6:20-21). The Jews approached Jesus and said, “He is worthy to be helped!” The centurion said to Jesus, “I am not worthy for you to even enter my house!” Lastly, he was a man who called Jesus, Lord, and believed in the power of His word (7:6; cf. Lk. 6:46). In Matthew 8:10-12 it says, “Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, ‘Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west (the Gentiles), and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and

Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom (the Jews) will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” In other words, Jesus used the centurion as an example of a Gentile who would “recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” Everything that is written about him is characteristic of a true disciple. Everything that was written about him was a display of faith.

Sadly, Jesus had to use a Gentile, an occupying Roman soldier, a man working for the despised Herod Antipas, to illustrate what a true disciple was, since there was no one among the chosen people who displayed these traits. The centurion was not only poor in spirit; he put himself completely at Jesus’ mercy and fully understood the authority to give life which Jesus possessed. For these reasons, Jesus was astonished.

7:10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

When the messengers returned home they found the slave well. Matthew clearly says that the healing took place while the men were with Jesus, but Luke leaves this information as an inference.

7:11 Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd.

7:12 Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her.

7:13 When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep."

7:14 And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!"

7:15 The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother.

7:16 Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!"

7:17 This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.

John 1:18 says, “No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” Nobody has seen God, but the greatest, clearest vision of God that man has ever, or will ever see, is in Jesus Christ. Jesus has declared God; that is, He has unfolded or revealed God through His words and acts. The story of the raising of the dead in the City of Nain is one of many examples of this.

The story of raising the widow’s son at Nain is unique to Luke. It is probably mentioned by him to prepare the readers for the reply to John the Baptist’s messengers that follows this passage (Morris, 153). Most believe that Nain was a little town southeast of Nazareth, a day’s journey from Capernaum.

"It came about soon afterwards," that is, soon after the healing recorded in the prior passage, Jesus traveled to Nain accompanied by His disciples and a large crowd. At the gate of the city He crossed paths with a funeral procession going out of the city (the dead were buried outside the city gates). A woman’s only son had died. The loss of an only son was the most sorrowful experience in Jewish society. When

the prophets depicted tragedy they even sometimes spoke of it in terms of losing a son. When God was judging Israel, Amos, the prophet, said, "I will make it like a time of mourning for an only son, a bitter day." Someday, Israel is going to look on the crucified Christ, and Zechariah 12:10 says, "they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only son and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn." "Cry," Jeremiah says, "mourn as for an only son, a lamentation most bitter" (Jer. 6:26).

But this woman was also a widow, making the story even more tragic. In that day and culture there were few opportunities for women to work. She now had no man to provide for her or a son to be the family heir. Thus, she was left in the world alone without any hope for the future. The large crowd that accompanied her shows the empathy that the town had toward her plight.

Jesus approached, told the woman to stop weeping, and laid His hand on the coffin.

The word for "coffin" could also mean "bier" (see ESV), that is, a movable frame on which a corpse is carried to the grave. This is probably what is being described. The body would simply be wrapped in a cloth and carried on the stretcher in the procession. Normally, anyone who touched anything contaminated by a corpse would become ceremonially defiled and in need of going through elaborate rituals to be made clean again. But nothing defiled Jesus, whether real or ritual. As Hebrews 7:26 says, He is "holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners."

No one asked Jesus to help and it is not noted that anyone had faith that He could raise the dead. Jesus acted because He was filled with compassion (7:13). Compassion is what sets God apart from all other gods. There is no deity in any other religion that is described as compassionate, loving, gracious, forgiving, kind, merciful, and tender-hearted. There is no Savior-god in any other religions. The compassion of God fills the OT. In Judges 10:16 it says, "God could bear no longer the misery of Israel." God felt the pain of Israel's misery. Lamentations 3:22: "The Lord's loving-kindnesses indeed never cease for His compassions never fail, they are new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness." In Jesus we see the same compassion that is true of God in the Old Testament. Jesus had sympathy with human sadness. It says in Matthew 9:36, "When Jesus saw the multitude, He felt compassion on them." In Mark 1:21, He met a leper and was moved with compassion and healed him. In Mark 8:2 Jesus said, "I feel compassion for the multitude." Why? "Because they've remained with me three days and have nothing to eat." In Mark 8:2 Jesus wasn't even addressing a spiritual issue; He just felt pain inside because the crowd who was with Him was hungry. God cares. Jesus cares.

He then spoke to the corpse, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" At His word, life surged into the corpse. Immediately, the dead man sat up and began to speak – evidencing that he had really risen from the dead.

In John 5:25-29 Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." Someday, at the end of the age,

Jesus will give life to everyone who ever lived so raising this young man must have been a very simple task.

Verse 15 says, "And Jesus gave him back to his mother." That is the reason that Jesus brought life to the boy.

The reaction of the crowd was typical of those who experience the power of God. They feared. This is the same reaction when Jesus calmed the sea (Mk. 4:41), healed the paralytic (Lk. 5:26), healed the Gerasene demonic (Lk. 8:37), etc. "They began glorifying God" and declaring that "God has visited His people!" They knew God was in their midst; they were terrified at His presence; they glorified Him; they declared that God had visited them. And "this report" (the report that God was visiting them, and that a man had been raised from the dead) went out all over Judea.

This was a proper response, however, we cannot help to note that they fell short of seeing who Jesus was; they declared God had visited them, but they did not understand the extent of His visitation. They thought that God was with Christ, but failed to see that God was in Christ. They understated the reality of who Jesus was, and associated Him with other prophets. They thought He was no different than Elisha and Elijah who also raised the dead (1 Ki. 17:17ff; 2 Ki. 4:18ff.). They had failed to see that God raised the dead through Elisha and Elijah's prayers, while Jesus raised the dead by the word of His power.