

☒ LIFE OF JESUS

May 2, 2021 | *Jesus Heals the Sick and Raises the Widow's Son*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

- Reflect on how your faith in Jesus is demonstrated when you face times of great need.
- Read Luke 7:1–17.
- Pray that God would multiply your faith so that you are eager to go to Him in times of need.

THIS WEEK

☒ KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Jesus responds to great faith and great need.

☒ THEOLOGY APPLIED

The gospel shows us how to depend on Jesus in every area of our lives. We are constantly in need of His grace in our lives. Jesus utilizes our faith to work His grace in us.

☒ MEDITATE

“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’” (Luke 7:9).

GETTING STARTED

+ *Use this section to prepare your heart for the truths you will encounter this week and to connect this passage's main point to your own life.*

Q: *What principles do you use to seek the approval of others?*

Q: *How can applying these same principles to win Jesus's approval endanger our relationship with Him?*

How can I get through to you?! Many parents feel like they utter this line multiple times a day to their children. This same sentiment can also arise between managers and employees, doctors and patients, and essentially any other kind of relationship we form. When we have an urgent or important message to communicate, we want to make sure we do it with the gravity we intend. But we often struggle to communicate the most important messages well.

When it comes to our relationship with Jesus, we want to ensure that our message gets through to Him because He is the one who forgives and breaks the power of sin, which is always the biggest problem we face. But how can we get through to Jesus? How can we ensure He sees and hears how dire our message is? This might seem like a strange question to ask. We know Jesus as the risen Lord who is seated at the right hand of the Father (Ephesians 1:20). We have instant access to our Savior, and we need not worry whether He understands how dire our situation is (Ephesians 2:18). Nevertheless, the Gospels record instances when Jesus was particularly moved by what He encountered in those who sought Him. If we are seeking Jesus on His terms, we can learn a great deal from these episodes. This lesson focuses on two such encounters. We will see that Jesus responded to great faith and to great need.

Q: *How do you typically approach Jesus in prayer?*

Q: *How would you correlate the notion of respect with your understanding of God?*

APPLICATION POINT – When I was in college, there was a fad among Christian students, particularly young Christian men, to give the impression that Jesus would fit seamlessly into their friendship circles. The idea was not that they were particularly holy or pious but that He was relatable with His followers. “Jesus is my homeboy” was the popular slogan that expressed this trend. Jesus is astonishingly familiar to His followers, but this “Jesus is my homeboy” movement perhaps risks taking a wonderful concept in Christian thought to the point of being

out of balance within the entirety of the biblical witness. The centurion certainly did not express this cavalier attitude toward Jesus. As you reflect on approaching Jesus this week, consider whether the way you approach Him reflects the truth that He holds the entire universe together. Conversely, you may need consider whether you fully appreciate the nearness of Jesus. The incarnation shows us that He yearns to reach out to those in desperate need of Him.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+In Luke 7:1–17, we see Jesus responding to great faith and to great need. Neither story demands that these are prerequisites for Jesus to act, but they show how much Jesus valued these qualities among those He ministered to.

1. APPROACHING JESUS IN FAITH

2. APPROACHING JESUS WITH GREAT NEED

GOING DEEPER

+ *This section will study the stories of the centurion and the bereaved widow in greater detail. Doing so will illustrate the love of Jesus for those who would follow Him.*

1. APPROACHING JESUS IN FAITH

■ LUKE 7:1–10

🔍: *Why did the centurion send for Jesus?*

🔍: *Who did the centurion send to Jesus?*

It is always beneficial to “know somebody.” Often, jobs are filled by people who have a personal connection with someone already involved in the company. If you have car trouble, you can save a lot of money by handling the repairs with a friend. Knowing the right people can make life easier and open doors that would have otherwise been

closed. It is possible this scenario motivated the centurion's decision to send a group of respected Jews to Jesus on his behalf. He may have thought that Jesus, being Himself a Jew, would respond more favorably to His own countrymen than a military leader from among the Gentile people ruling over Israel. Jesus did not condemn these actions in this passage, and He did acquiesce to this request. It is not the Jewish cohort that amazed Jesus in this passage, however. Jesus is not impressed by the company we keep, our race, our standing in the community, or any number of other things. While "knowing somebody" may be the way we look for help in our modern society, this approach does not seem to be what moved Jesus to action.

Q: *What false ideas about winning Jesus's and/or God's approval do you encounter?*

Q: *How does approaching Jesus in ways other than what is described in Scripture sabotage the Holy Spirit's work in your life?*

APPLICATION POINT – Perhaps the biggest misconception about God on the part of people who are open to religious ideology but are not confessional Christians is the idea that salvation is tied to moralism. The idea is that God will judge favorably if a person's good actions outweigh their bad actions. The problem, of course, is this idea is absent from the gospel of Jesus Christ. Salvation is not based on our actions but on the work of Christ. Prepare an adequate defense of the truth of the gospel that you can share when you encounter people who are deceived by moralism. Make sure your defense is adaptable. Sometimes, you may have the person's attention for only a few seconds. Other times, you will be able to have a much fuller conversation. Whatever the occasion, make sure you can adequately share your faith with those who need it.

Q: *Why did the Jews argue that the centurion was worthy of Jesus's intervention?*

Q: *What was Jesus's reaction to their request?*

The Jews in Capernaum thought very highly of the centurion. Typically, the Jews resented having Roman soldiers in their country, but this centurion had taken numerous steps to establish a good reputation with

them. He had built the local synagogue and also expressed his admiration for Judaism. For these reasons, the Jews were eager to intercede on his behalf.

The problem is that the logic of the Jewish leaders effectively circumvents the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. The Jews claimed that the centurion was worthy of Jesus fulfilling his request, but if he were worthy, then was Jesus in some sense obligated to act? It is almost as if these Jewish leaders felt the centurion was owed a favor in response to his generosity. Jesus did not respond negatively to their perception, but the centurion's generosity to the Jews is not mentioned again. This should at least cause us to wonder whether the Jews were working with a faulty understanding of grace and faith. We are given further reason to question their outlook when the centurion's own testimony calls that idea into question. The centurion claimed he was not worthy to have Jesus entering his house. The centurion certainly did not think his generosity toward the Jewish community placed any obligation on Jesus. The way the Jewish leaders framed this situation undermined the nature of the centurion's faith and Jesus's grace. Jesus did not owe the centurion anything, but He was eager to respond favorably to the type of faith the centurion showed.

Q: *What makes us worthy of Jesus's work in our lives?*

Q: *How do you limit God's ability to show grace in your life?*

APPLICATION POINT – When we operate according to worldly principles, we often circumvent God's grace in our lives. Many people want to approach God on the terms of quid pro quo. They offer to change their lives for the better or give generously to the poor in exchange for God meeting their need. "God, if you help me land this job, I'll go to church more often and give money to the church." This principle may be commonplace in the world, but it does not work as a frame for our engagement with God. For starters, humans are notoriously abysmal at keeping up their end of the deal. It turns out that loving and serving God cannot be faithfully accomplished on a contractual basis. But more fundamentally problematic is that such a bargain with God denies the opportunity for God to demonstrate His grace. If God is contractually obligated to give us what we are due, then we will never feel the joy of being loved by Him. He offers us much more than this! Do you ever approach God in this manner? Even if not so blatant, does this mindset form the framework for how you deal with Him? If so, pray that He would help you to trust in His grace and approach Him in love. We need God's grace in our lives more than we need our own determination or craftiness.

Q: *What was the centurion trying to communicate when he compared Jesus's authority to his own?*

Q: *How did the centurion's words demonstrate great faith?*

When he heard that Jesus was on the way to his home, the centurion sent his servants to Him with a message. The message essentially compared the authority of Jesus with that of the centurion. In both cases, their wills were absolute. They spoke and others listened and obeyed. If we are not careful, however, we can miss why Jesus was so amazed by the centurion's faith. The centurion had authority over the soldiers under his command. The subject of Jesus's authority is not explicitly mentioned, but we must remember what the centurion was requesting. He wanted his servant to be healed and spared from death. When he expressed his confidence in Jesus's authority, he acknowledged that sickness and death are subject to Jesus's authority in the same way his soldiers were subject to his authority. This truly is remarkable faith in the authority of Jesus Christ!

Q: *How does your faith compare with the centurion's?*

Q: *Where do you go in times of great need?*

APPLICATION POINT – “The only things certain in life are death and taxes.” Such expressions acknowledge the absolute pervasiveness of death in our world. Although the centurion's servant was spared on this occasion, he did eventually die. So did the centurion. And the rest of their generation. Sometimes, death can seem like such a certainty that Christians struggle to pray boldly on behalf of others. Yet the centurion did, and Jesus was amazed by his faith. The Gospels often show us the need to pray for faithfulness even in the face of death, but this passage shows us we should also never hesitate to ask God to intercede miraculously on behalf of those facing sickness and death. God can certainly respond affirmatively to such prayers. The key for us is maintaining a proper balance. We need to recognize the certainty of death, at least until Jesus returns, and pray for faithfulness, but we also need to recognize the authority of our Savior even over sickness and death. As you pray for others over the coming months, seek to maintain this balance. For many of you, this may mean praying boldly for Jesus's healing hand.

Q: *Did Jesus ever meet the servant?*

Q: *How many times did someone intercede for someone else in this story?*

The centurion's servant was saved from death, but Jesus never met him—or even the centurion! On three different occasions in this passage, we see intercession being made on the behalf of others. The centurion interceded for his servant. The Jews sent by the centurion interceded for him. The servants interceded for the centurion a second time. This repeated emphasis certainly demonstrates the importance of intercession among those seeking to be faithful to Christ.

Q: *Who do you know in need of the work of Jesus Christ?*

Q: *How can you intercede to Christ on behalf of others?*

APPLICATION POINT – Christians can follow the pattern demonstrated in this passage by praying on behalf of others. This is known as intercessory prayer, and the Bible contains many examples of such prayers. Since prayer is often the mechanism through which God releases His power into the world, one of the greatest acts of kindness we can do for others is to pray on their behalf. If you want to become more intentional in intercessory prayer, seek to form some prayer groups in your church. Such groups allow for mutual prayers to be lifted to God and are a great illustration of how we should serve one another through prayer.

2. APPROACHING JESUS THROUGH GREAT NEED

☐ LUKE 7:11-17

Q: *Why was the woman in this story in great need?*

Q: *How did Jesus respond to her need?*

The woman Jesus encountered in Nain was in great need. She had already lost her husband, and now her only son had also died. In a patriarchal society, this woman would have been in great need without a husband or a son to care for her. In addition to her physical need, she would have been faced with enormous emotional needs as well. Rather than approaching Jesus, Jesus approached her to meet her need. Jesus, with very little fanfare, spoke, and the son was raised from the dead. Luke draws considerable attention to Jesus's emotional investment in this woman. He was stirred with compassion and told her not to weep. This was a bold thing to say to someone who has just lost a family member, but Jesus recognized that the reason for her mourning would soon be resolved.

Q: *Are you willing to go to Jesus with your needs?*

Q: *How are you able to show compassion to those who are in need?*

APPLICATION – Jesus demonstrated amazing compassion to this needy widow. Followers of Jesus need to show the same capacity for compassion. You cannot raise loved ones from the grave, but you can meet many needs by having compassion upon those who are mourning. This will look different in every case. Some people will want someone to weep with them. Others may simply want companionship for a few hours. Whatever the case, be prepared to meet people in their needs.

Q: *How did the people describe Jesus after He raised the widow's son?*

Q: *What response did Jesus's miraculous deed incite?*

In raising the widow's son, Jesus took up the prophetic mantle of the prophet Elijah, who also raised a widow's son back to life (1 Kings 17:17–24). In recording this episode from Jesus's ministry Luke established a connection between Him and the prophets of the Old Testament.

Q: *Why was it important for Luke to establish this link between Jesus and Elijah?*

Q: *What value do you place on the Old Testament?*

APPLICATION POINT – Christians believe in the divine inspiration of both the Old and New Testaments. But in many cases, Christians struggle to see the importance of the Old Testament. This passage, however, shows continuity between the two testaments. Jesus picked up the ministry begun by Elijah and will bring that ministry to its conclusion. During your devotional times this week, if you are reading in the Old Testament, look for more points of connection between Jesus's followers and the Bible.


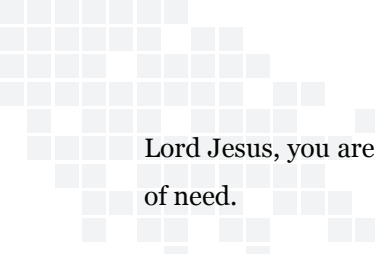
NEXT STEPS

Christians are often far more at home in this world than we would like to think. When we react to the problems we face, we often do it in our own strength rather than seeking God's wisdom and grace. Think about two or three significant problems or decisions you have made over the past month. In what ways did you seek God's aid through those problems? In what ways did you rely on worldly wisdom? Try to anticipate two or three problems you might face in the coming months. What would it look like to bring these issues before a gracious and wise God instead of seeking to solve it on your own? Being prepared for future challenges may help you meet them more faithfully.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

Father, help me to identify when worldly wisdom is leading me away from your grace.



Lord Jesus, you are full of grace and compassion for those who are in need of you. Help me to flee to you in times of need.

God, help me to intercede on behalf of others.

Lord, help me not to approach you with worldly wisdom but as one who needs grace and forgiveness.