

Such a great salvation

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Date: 16 April 2023

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[0 : 00] let us ask God for his help. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would reveal yourself to us, make us alive, open the eyes of our heart, grow us, show us Christ.

All this we pray for your name's sake. Amen. Now, did you ever remember how when you were a little kid, everything seemed big to you? Perhaps, as a kid, you remember a favourite restaurant being particularly spacious, or a favourite vacation spot having so many different parts to explore.

But then, years later, having not visited for a while, you go back to that restaurant or that resort, and you think to yourself, oh, I don't recall them being quite so small.

What has happened? Well, those places haven't changed. You have. You've grown up. And as you've grown up, you've gained proper perspective. Those things are no longer quite so big to you now.

You see them as they really are. Now, here's my question this morning. Is this your experience of Jesus as well?

[1 : 18] You see, I wonder if sometimes we look at Jesus the same way we look at our childhood restaurant or resort. When we first became a Christian, we found Jesus really big.

He's amazing. He's wonderful. He's great. But as we go on, we don't find him as big as before. We find him shrinking in our eyes.

What has happened? Well, just like those places, Jesus hasn't changed. We have. But in this case, we no longer see Jesus as he really is.

Why might that be the case? Perhaps we started becoming very confident in ourselves. We started to make ourselves big.

We started thinking that, oh, actually, I think I can work out life on my own. I appreciate Jesus, yes, but I think I can handle stuff by myself.

[2 : 23] I'll just check in with Jesus every once in a while when I need a second opinion. But otherwise, I'll kind of leave what he has to say to the side. And as a result, Jesus starts to become smaller to us.

Or perhaps our problems have begun feeling really big. You know, they started to overwhelm us, threatening to pull us down underneath their waves and leave us gasping for air.

And as a result, Jesus starts to become simply a speck on the distant horizon. He becomes smaller to us.

Well, today, Luke wants to help us regain perspective. He wants to help us see Jesus clearly and see especially his bigness. He wants us to be certain again about the things we were first taught when we became Christians.

Above all, he wants to help us keep following Jesus. In the last few weeks, we've been listening to Jesus teach about what life in his kingdom involves.

[3 : 35] But in today's passage, we don't just find out what Jesus says, but what he does. Jesus is still teaching, but this time it comes in the form of action.

And in these two episodes, we're going to explore, he's going to show how big he really is. And then over the next two weeks, Jesus will show us how that should significantly impact the way we respond to him.

But let's look now at these two stories that form today's passage. And in each story, we're going to compare something big in the life of that person and see how that compares to Jesus.

So, first of all, let's consider the bigness of this man's CV. In verse 1, we find Jesus heading back to Capernaum.

Now, this is more or less home base where Jesus was previously back in chapter 4. And do you remember what happened the last time he was there? At the end of chapter 4, he amazed the crowds with his authoritative teaching, teaching that was unlike anyone else.

[4 : 48] He cast out an impure spirit and healed many people. So Jesus is now back where all the exciting stuff was happening before.

And then in verse 2, we're introduced to some new characters. We're told about a centurion and his servant. But here's the interesting thing.

The servant on the face of it is the one with the problem. He's seriously ill. He's about to die. But actually, he's not the central character of this story.

By the end of this story, he becomes almost an afterthought. Instead, the person of interest here is the centurion.

He's the one Luke wants us to pay attention to. Now, that's a bit unexpected. Who is the centurion? Well, he's the enemy.

[5 : 50] He's a Roman soldier. This is the oppressor. This is the persecutor. This is the outsider. And he is someone who is powerful.

Centurions didn't just belong to the rank and file, but were officers put in charge of 80 to 100 soldiers. They were typically people of economic means, people of influence, people whom you might approach for a favor.

In other words, people with authority. But as we keep reading, this particular centurion stands out in several ways.

For one thing, he obviously cares about his servant. He doesn't treat him like a commodity, but someone whose life is worth trying to save.

Now, it's hidden in our English translations, but down in verse 7, when the centurion speaks directly about his servant, the Greek word for servant there is actually different from the one used in verse 2.

[6 : 58] It's a word that has more personal connotations, a word that a father might use for his child. So they have a relationship that transcends typical master-slave relations.

And this centurion is obviously sensitive to Jew-Gentile relational dynamics. After all, he is a non-Jew, on the opposite side.

And he knows that it might be a bit presumptuous to think that he can get direct access to Jesus. Just like that. So, he doesn't have low EQ, he can read the room, but that doesn't stop him from doing the initiating.

In verse 3, we know he's heard of Jesus. I suppose after all that Jesus has done in Capernaum, I mean, how could he not? So he sends a Jewish delegation on his behalf.

So, we've gotten the flavor of what this centurion is like. But just in case we need more confirmation of this man's credentials, the elders he sends also provide a character reference.

[8 : 14] Verse 4. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, this man deserves to have you do this because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.

Wow! So, this is a guy who far from holding the Jewish nation in contempt like many of the other Romans, he actually has great affection for them.

He's even contributed greatly to their building project. What a guy! Now, most likely, he was what was sometimes called a God-fearer, someone who was attracted to Israel's God and rejected all the other plethora of gods that dominated the Greco-Roman culture of the day.

And so, the Jewish elders insist, this man deserves your attention. This man deserves your favor. This man deserves your blessing.

That's their assessment. His credentials are impeccable. So, Jesus, do your duty on behalf of the Jewish community and repay this man who is worthy.

[9 : 36] It's quite fascinating, isn't it, to watch how the Jewish elders try to carry favor with Jesus. They paint a picture of a man who, in their minds, is supremely qualified to see Jesus.

And I wonder if that is the picture in our minds as well of what it takes to see Jesus. Have you ever tried to secure a meeting with someone in a position of power, someone who is much higher up than you are?

You know that to secure the meeting, you have to sell yourself. You need to present a good CV. You need to make sure that your presentation slides are impressive.

You need to project yourself as someone who is cool, calm, and confident. Perhaps you even need someone to put in a good word for you beforehand.

And sometimes, that's what we think it takes for us to go and see Jesus. We need to impress him. We need some big credentials.

[10 : 43] Perhaps it's by the size of our giving. Perhaps it's by the amount of our serving. Perhaps it's by the extent of our learning. Perhaps it's by the degree of our obeying.

That's how the world often works, doesn't it? It says, to meet someone big, make yourself big. And that's certainly the values by which these Jewish elders work.

And often, we let those values shape the way we approach Jesus. We rely on the bigness of our credentials. But as we follow this story, Luke says, that's not what really matters.

What matters is not the bigness of this centurion's CV, but the bigness of Jesus' authority. So look again at Luke 7 and see the bigness of Jesus' authority.

As Jesus approaches the centurion's house, verse 6 again, he encounters a second delegation. And they bring the message from the centurion, Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.

[11 : 59] Now, that's really interesting. The elders have just taken the time to try to prove to Jesus that this centurion is totally deserving. But now, here comes the friends of the centurion who bring a message direct from his lips.

And what does he say? I'm not deserving. I'm not worthy. You see, it seems as if the Jewish delegation had not represented the centurion very well.

they probably thought, oh, we've got to help him. So, best thing to do, talk him up. Flash the bigness of his credentials. Impress Jesus that way. But that was never the true intention of the centurion.

For he knows at the end of the day, they count for nothing. They might be big in the world's eyes. They might even be big in the eyes of religion. But they're small to Jesus.

And don't forget, in this culture, the social norms are such that a superior should not deal directly with someone who is vastly inferior.

[13 : 16] But now this centurion says, I do not even consider myself worthy to come to you. In my role, I'm normally the powerful one, but in this case, I know myself to be on the inferior end of the spectrum.

And he doesn't regard himself as undeserving simply because he's a Gentile, as one or two scholars might suggest. After all, he is more than willing to deal with other Jewish people.

No, he regards himself as undeserving specifically in relation to Jesus. He humbles himself. And this centurion gets it partly because he understands the idea of authority very well.

After all, he's normally the one in authority. When, verse 8, he tells someone, go, they go. When he says, come, they come.

When he says, do it, they do it. And he knows what it's like to be under authority. He answers to Caesar. When Caesar gives a command, he obeys.

[14 : 29] He doesn't protest. He doesn't procrastinate. He does it. He knows what authority is all about. And now he says, Jesus, you are the one with ultimate authority.

For I recognize even disease and death comes under your jurisdiction. temptation. That's how big your authority is.

You speak, it happens. So, verse 7, Jesus, say the word, and my servant will be healed. I know everything comes under your command.

And so, verse 9, Jesus is amazed. Do you see? Jesus wasn't amazed by the credentials the Jewish elders presented to him.

He wasn't amazed at the status of this centurion. In fact, in all of the four gospel accounts, Jesus is said to be amazed only twice. And the only other time he's amazed, it isn't positive.

[15 : 38] In Mark chapter 6, he's amazed at his hometown's lack of faith. But here, he is amazed by the faith of this centurion, of this outsider.

And so, he tells the crowd, verse 9 again, I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel. After all, up to this point, no Jewish leader has acknowledged Jesus' authority at all.

On the contrary, they hate it when Jesus says things like, he's the Lord of the Sabbath. You see, in the end, this is what Luke wants us to get.

faith is the point of this story isn't the healing in itself. That's almost incidental. It's how this centurion submits to the bigness of Jesus' authority rather than depend on the bigness of his own CV.

And this, Jesus shows us, is how faith is to be defined. Faith is about saying to Jesus, I am small, you are big. Faith is saying to Jesus, I don't rely on myself, I can only rely on you.

[16 : 53] Faith is saying to Jesus, I am unworthy, you are worthy. Faith is saying, you're in charge, not me. It's about saying, Jesus, you are Lord, I am not.

Did you notice how in verse 6, that is what the centurion calls Jesus? Lord, don't trouble yourself. Lord, what a word for a Gentile to use.

Now, of course, the word Lord there could simply mean master, so it could just be the centurion being respectful. But I do wonder if the centurion already had an inkling of who Jesus really is.

After all, in the Old Testament, who alone can say the word and things happen. There is only one person who can do that.

There is only one person who says, let there be light, and it happens. And now the centurion says, Jesus, say the word, and my servant will be healed.

[18 : 00] In other words, Jesus, I acknowledge that you alone carry the same exact authority as God. God And let's be careful not to fall into a common misunderstanding here.

This story is not saying, look how big the centurion's faith is, so make sure your faith is big enough too. The point is not the power of the centurion's faith.

Rather, the point is that the centurion so forthrightly puts his trust in the powerful one. The bigness of Jesus is the point, not the bigness of the faith.

Tim Keller illustrates it this way. Imagine you're on a cliff and you lose your footing and begin to fall, but you manage to grab onto a strong branch, one that can more than support your wake.

Now, how can it save you? If the branch is weak, it doesn't matter how much faith you have. You will fall. But what if your mind is filled with doubts and uncertainties about whether the branch can save you, but you grab the branch anyway?

[19 : 16] You will be saved, because it is not the strength of your faith, but the object of your faith that saves you. In other words, the question here is not so much how big is your faith, but rather are you putting faith in the right person when you decide to trust Jesus?

And Jesus' answer is yes, you are. Let me back that up. Watch me as I heal this servant from afar.

Watch me demonstrate the authority of God himself. Watch me so that you know you can trust me. God so this is what Luke wants us to first see today.

The bigness of Jesus' authority. And as we do so, he asks us, are you fully entrusting yourself to his authority? Are you coming to him as one who acknowledges yourself to be weak and helpless and needy?

Or are you trying to come to him with a CV to show how strong and capable you are? How do you know? Well, here are some questions to consider.

[20 : 37] Has the need to control everything in your life become all-consuming? What happens when something unexpected comes to throw your life off track?

A serious illness, maybe? And unexpected family issue? The loss of a job? Where do you turn to?

Do you turn to yourself to make things right? Do you work harder and harder? Then perhaps you've lost sight of how big Jesus' authority is.

You see, when we try to take total control, we are attempting what only God can handle. And that is a dead end. But when we humble ourselves and give up control, we also give up the burden of doing what we cannot do.

After all, humility, as the writer Andrew Murray once put it, is simply acknowledging the truth of our position as creature and yielding to God his place.

[21 : 48] saying that we are here, we are not God, he alone is God. And when we give up control as the centurion does here, we find grace.

We find that we become the recipients of Jesus' undeserved kindness. When we stop trying to say how big we are and say instead, Jesus, how big you are, we can find help.

But that's not all Luke wants us to see about Jesus today. And that's why he gives us a second story in Luke 7 verse 11 to 17. And in this story, he draws our attention initially to the bigness of this woman's desperation, the bigness of this woman's desperation.

in verse 11, Jesus heads to a town called Nine, about a day's journey from where he was. And verse 12, as he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.

Now let that scene linger over you for a minute. This is a funeral procession. And just as in the first story, Luke wants to bring to our attention a person of interest.

[23 : 23] He wants us to take a good look at this woman. Here is a woman whose husband has already died and now she has to bury her son, her only son.

son. This is a life marked by tragedy. This is the life Jesus is encountering, one soaked with tears and seasoned with grief.

And this is a life that is now marked by vulnerability. Don't forget that at that time the man would have been the bread winners. Now, where is her income going to come from?

There is no social welfare available. Even if her husband was well off, a widow could not inherit her husband's estate. And so this is a life now weighed down with anxieties and heavy with fears.

What would happen to this woman now? Can you feel the bigness of this woman's desperation situation?

[24 : 36] Now, perhaps for a couple of you, this is especially relatable today. Right now, you're caught up in something, something that has you crying out, wondering where help is going to come from.

Perhaps right now, it is a season where you've been shedding tears. I think I'm aware of at least three situations like that in the past week. And the truth is, although the intensity varies, what this woman is experiencing is what we will all experience at some point in our lives, isn't it?

At some point, all of us will experience bereavement. and it's painful, even for Christians. That's the reality of life in a fallen world.

But now, Luke says, as you consider this woman's desperation, see now also the bigness of Jesus' compassion, the bigness of Jesus' compassion.

verse 13. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, don't cry.

[25 : 53] What a beautiful verse that is. Notice three things about it. First of all, the Lord sees her. It's a big crowd gathered here, isn't it?

But it is not those with amazing CVs, but the distressed and the afflicted who draw the Lord's eye. And if that is you today, don't ever think that you will escape the Lord's attention.

His eye is on you. And then second of all, his heart went out to her. It's possible, isn't it, to hear about pain and affliction, but not feel any compassion?

We do it all the time whenever we read or watch the news. But Jesus is moved by her sorrows. And then third of all, he says, don't cry.

Don't cry. Now, think about that for a moment. Sometimes when people say, don't cry to an upset person, it's actually the worst thing you could say, isn't it?

[27 : 03] For one thing, if you say, don't cry, you could be communicating, oh, yes, I know it's sad, but really you should have gotten over it by now. Or you could be communicating, stop it, you're getting too emotional for my liking.

So it could actually be quite a cruel thing to say. But when Jesus says, don't cry, he doesn't mean any of those things. Instead, when he says, don't cry, he is now calling on the woman to exercise the same faith as the centurion.

You see, if Jesus cannot do anything about the current situation, to say, don't cry to her, would have been pretty insensitive. Why shouldn't she?

She's just lost her only son, and nothing is bringing him back. But Jesus says, don't forget the bigness of my authority.

I can do something about this. And I want to do something about this. And so verse 14, he does something scandalous.

[28 : 15] He stops the funeral procession and touches the coffin. Can you imagine if there was a funeral procession leaving this church hall, and someone stepped right in front of the procession and started touching the coffin?

What a sight that must be. no wonder the people stood still. But you see, Jesus is vividly demonstrating what he has the authority to do.

He can stop people heading to the grave. He can do what no other person in this entire universe can ever do. That's what he did for the centurion servant, and that's what he will do for this young man.

Get up, Jesus says. And he does. And then see how far Jesus' compassion goes in verse 15. Jesus gave him back to his mother.

Death severs relationships. Jesus puts them back together again. Do you see the bigness of Jesus' compassion?

[29 : 27] You see, if we only ever had the story of the centurion, we could conclude that Jesus has authority? Yes. But so what? He might not use that authority for good.

He might just stand at a distance. After all, was not his healing of the centurion's servant a remote healing? But not here. Jesus' heart is on full display here.

He doesn't stand far away. He's right there touching the coffin. Not caring that he's ritually defiling himself. And so today, my brothers and sisters, if you're going through a really hard time right now, know that Jesus stands right beside you.

And he won't handle you roughly. He will treat you gently. Look again at this woman. What does she have to offer Jesus?

Answer? Nothing. woman. We don't even hear a single word about her faith, which again suggests that the strength of one's faith is not the point of this section.

[30 : 40] And you might think, I have nothing to offer Jesus except for my obvious need for him. I have nothing to offer Jesus except to say to him, please fix me.

him. But Jesus says that's fine. You don't have to force his heart. His heart goes out to us. And this morning, I want to specifically address those in situations where you are the primary carer.

Perhaps you are caring for an aging parent, a sick spouse, a child with disabilities. did you notice that today, that is who Jesus' heart is for?

Not just the sick person, but the carer. It's the centurion. It's the widow. And he's inviting you to bring to him your fears, your frustrations, your ambivalence, your guilt, your sadness.

Because he sees you his heart goes out to you and he says, don't cry. You see, what is the big thing Luke wants us to see from today's passage?

[32 : 00] It is to see the bigness of both Jesus' authority and compassion. He wants us to see that Jesus is powerful. Even the biggest enemy of all, death, cannot overcome him.

He just has to say the word and all sorts of things happen. But that is not enough. Because if that is all Jesus is, he could easily become a divine tyrant.

But Jesus is also deeply compassionate. It is one of the most common ways Jesus is described in the Gospels, in fact. He's not indifferent about us.

He's not breaking out in a temper against us. And if Jesus is both strong and kind, is that not good news?

For who Jesus is, is who God is. He is the very image of God. And this is who Jesus will always and forever be.

[33 : 03] How do we know? Well, for those of you who know your Old Testament, I wonder if these two stories sound somewhat familiar. Actually, Jesus has already given us a hint back in Luke 4, verse 25-27, where he references the prophets Elijah and Elisha and Naaman.

For when we turn the pages of the Bible back to 1 and 2 Kings in the Old Testament, this is what we find. Just like the centurion, Naaman was a well-respected Gentile soldier.

Just like the centurion, Naaman relied on a Jewish go-between for healing. Just like the centurion, Naaman does not ultimately meet the person he approached, the prophet Elisha in this case.

Instead, the healing is also done from a distance. And this widow recalls another widow whom the prophet Elijah meets, one who is also found at the gate of the town with a son who is dead and who is brought back to life and restored to his mother.

That's the exact wording. It's the same one. Why this echoes? Well, I think one big reason is to show God hasn't changed.

[34 : 22] This is who God has always been. And he's doing it again through Jesus. In verse 16, the people cry out, a great prophet has appeared among us.

God has come to help his people. And you can be confident that this is who Jesus is right now today, not just in the pages of the Bible. He is greater than even a prophet as next week will show.

He is God come to help his people. He is the one on the throne who never suffers compassion fatigue. And he does what he says. Think back to just what Jesus has been teaching.

Do you remember? Let me remind you. In 6 verse 27, he said, love your enemies, love those on the other side, love those who persecute you.

And that's exactly what he does by going to a Roman centurion. He said in 6 verse 20 to 21, blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

[35 : 29] Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. And the widow God exactly that.

That's what Luke chapter 7 verse 1 to 17 is all about. It is not that God will right at this very moment bring back to life every child who died way too young.

It is not that God will right at this very moment heal every disease if you just have enough faith. It is that you can be utterly confident no matter what, God is exercising both his authority and his compassion to help his people.

That's the purpose of today's passage. The bigness of his authority and compassion knows no bounds. And we see that supremely in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the only son of the father whom God sent to die on the cross so that such a great salvation can be guaranteed for us.

A great salvation that includes a future resurrection life with no more suffering as he deals with our root cause, the sin. So let me finish today by taking you to a scene from C.S.

[36 : 59] Lewis' book Prince Caspian. Now in this scene, Lucy sees Aslan the lion who is the Christ figure in the book after a long time. And as she happily hugs him and looks up at him, she says, Aslan, you're bigger.

And Aslan says, that's because you are older, little one. Lucy says, not because you are. And Aslan replies, every year you grow, you will find me bigger.

Here's the amazing thing. As I said at the beginning of the sermon, when we grow up, we discover so many things are smaller than we thought. But not with Jesus. As we grow up in him, we will find him bigger, and bigger.

And my prayer this morning is that you will experience his authority and compassion in bigger and bigger ways. Let's pray. Praise you, Father, for who you are.

Praise you for Jesus, who shows us what you are really like. Praise you that you are the one in charge of the entire universe. You control every single thing. You have authority over every single thing.

[38 : 29] You have authority even over death. And yet, Father, you are the father of all compassion. Your heart goes out to us. And I pray, Lord, for everyone in this hall who especially needs to hear that, who needs to hear about your authority and your compassion, they would hear it clearly today.

I pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.