

They Met Jesus: *Surprising Jesus*

All of us have had times in our life when we've been really surprised. Maybe it was someone doing something special for us we didn't know was coming. Maybe it was something that shocked us or amazed us. It could have been an accident or a tragedy that hit us unexpectedly.

Since we're not all-knowing and can't see the future it's not that hard to catch us off guard. But it is hard to imagine anything surprising Jesus.

Today is week 6 of a series we've titled "They Met Jesus." Two thousand years ago God fulfilled ancient prophecies by stepping into our world as a man.

He took on flesh in order to be the perfect substitute for all of us. He came to die for our sins. But Jesus came for a number of other reasons too. He came to be an example. He came to be a teacher. And, He came to be the divine representative of humanity. The last Adam.

As Jesus walked those dusty roads of ancient Palestine He encountered a lot of people along the way. In this series we're taking a close look at 7 of those individuals who met the Lord face to face.

Today we want to see how Jesus reacted to a man that most Jews would have considered a sworn enemy, a Roman centurion.

Open your Bibles to Luke chapter 7 page 1013

Luke chapter 7 begins with a unique story of faith. It's a faith that the Bible says surprised Jesus.

Read verses 1-2

Capernaum was located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, and was an important Roman port where Herod Antipas built a Roman garrison. Several Roman centurions, who were each responsible for 100 soldiers, were authorized to keep the peace in their occupied territory. Like most Roman citizens, these centurions had a number of slaves to carry out household tasks as well as administrative business within the garrison and the city.

A centurion was a lower ranking officer, probably similar in the Roman hierarchy to the position of an army captain. The ancient historian Polybius offers a list of qualifications that they looked for in centurions. They weren't supposed to be so much "seekers after danger, as men who can command, steady in action, and reliable; they ought not to be over anxious to rush into the fight; but when hard pressed they must be ready to hold their ground and die at their posts."

Among the centurions who would have stationed at the Capernaum garrison, there was a certain centurion who was really struggling with the fact that his beloved servant was very sick and might be dying.

Servant doesn't sound too bad to our western ears, but actually he was a slave. The Greek term is *doulos*, which means slave as opposed to a butler or a servant. As the Romans conquered and occupied nations they took many of the inhabitants and used them as slaves.

But obviously, this guy was more than just a common slave to this centurion.

Matthew's Gospel says he was paralyzed and in terrible suffering. He may have had a stroke, we don't know for sure, but now he was literally clinging to life.

What would the centurion do?

Read verse 3

Isn't this interesting? He's surrounded by Roman and Greek deities, and numerous mystery religions, but when it comes to the subject of life and death he is willing to place his faith in a Jew named Jesus.

Remember the centurion's a commander in an army that's occupying conquered territory.

You can be sure there was no love loss between the Jews and the Romans. In fact, the Jews for the most part hated the Romans. They'd suffered a lot of atrocities at their hands.

But now notice, there's something unique about this particular Roman centurion. He

sent some of the Jewish elders from the synagogue in Capernaum to Jesus. Why would the elders of the synagogue want to do anything to help this guy out?

Read verses 4 and 5

“He’s the top contributor to our building fund. He may be a Roman but he doesn’t hate us the way most of the Romans do. In fact he respects us. He regards our faith.”

In the first century the synagogue system was the most important institution in Judaism for spreading God's truth around the world. The temple in Jerusalem, which was the center of Jewish worship, excluded non-Jews.

In fact, the book of Acts records that a riot that took place when just the rumor circulated that an apostle named Paul had allowed a Gentile to come near the temple. But the synagogue system was uniquely a place where even Gentiles could come and listen to the Bible being taught.

When Paul began to preach all through the Roman Empire, some of the earliest Christians were Gentile believers called “God-fearers.” They were the ones who came and sat at the back or listened outside the window of synagogues to hear the word of God taught.

So in the time and place in which this centurion lived, the major thing he knew about was the synagogue system. So he used his money, his reputation, and his influence to build a synagogue.

For a non-Jew to get the leaders of the synagogue to “plead” with Jesus on his behalf says a lot about the esteem in which they held him. Respected Jews were usually very proud of the fact that they had nothing to do with non-Jews. They called Gentiles “dogs.”

There’s a sequence of blessings, found in the Jewish Talmud that include these lines. These are still recited by traditional Jewish men at the beginning of the daily morning prayers: “Blessed are you, Hashem (the Eternal One), King of the Universe, for not having made me a Gentile. Blessed are you, Hashem, King of the Universe, for not having made me a slave. Blessed are you, Hashem, King of the Universe, for not having made me a woman.”

This centurion was clearly an exception to that “all Gentiles are dogs” philosophy. He was obviously a seeker after the God of the Jews. They could see that. They admired him for it.

They thought Jesus should come because the centurion was worthy. They figured he earned the right to some special attention. Now contrast that attitude with the Centurion’s attitude.

I. True Faith Acts In Simple Reverence

He was reverent. There was no presumption in this guy’s request...no demands. He sent Jewish elders to Jesus who was a Jew and they asked earnestly. He wasn’t out to order Jesus to do anything.

Sometimes I get the impression that many Christians think that God owes them something. Have you ever noticed how when life doesn’t go their way, how many people who call themselves Christians end up defeated, despondent, even angry.

They want to order God to do what they want.

I hear people say, “It’s not fair.” In fact, I’ve probably mouthed those words a few times myself. I have a question about that statement. Who ever promised that life would be fair? I don’t see anything in the Bible that promises that life will be fair. Was it fair that Jesus Christ should die in our place? We’re the guilty ones, He’s the innocent one. What’s fair about that?

The most important focal point of God’s actions in human history; the most significant event that ever occurred on the face of the planet was totally unfair. But without it we’d be headed for hell.

The only hope of salvation, according to the Bible, is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The Bible says: *Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.* (Acts 4:12)

The only way to bring forgiveness to guilty sinners was for God to pay for their sins. We can’t earn our way to perfection, and that’s God’s standard; perfection.

The Bible says: God made Christ *who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* (II Corinthians 5:21)

That has nothing to do with fairness, but it has everything to do with justice and God is a god of justice, not fairness.

This centurion had no fairness issues or demands. He only had a simple reverence.

I. True Faith Acts In Simple Reverence

II. True Faith Acts In Humility

He was humble. Read verses 6 & 7a (Through “come to You.)

The Centurion knew his place. You could tell he had faith because he openly acknowledging he didn't deserve anything.

The centurion's Jewish friends want Jesus to save this officer's slave because of his good name, because of his love for Israel, because his good works among the Jews in Capernaum.

This centurion has a different take on it all. He either saw or heard what was going on with Jesus. This Gentile centurion was willing to place his faith in the person and power of Jesus as the Son of God.

So how does he approach Jesus? He approaches Jesus in a position of helplessness, in a spirit of gentleness and humility.

Now think about this: he knows who he is in the Roman system. He knows he has the power of life and death over his slaves. They were considered property under Roman law. So they obey him without question. But he also recognizes the power Jesus has over life, disease, demons, and death. So, he knows Jesus' physical presence isn't necessary to heal his favorite servant. Just say the word.

Are you demanding with God, or are you humble? We need to be so careful to see ourselves as we really are and God as He really is. This guy might have had all kinds of earthly power but he recognized that there was a power far greater than his.

There's always been these interesting movements that rise up in Christianity. A fairly recent one is called the Word of Faith movement. Word of Faith teachers tell us we're gods. Because we're made in God's image we carry His authority.

His words hold creative power (He said 'Let there be' and there was) and so do our's. Listen to what one well known Word of Faith teacher has written: "God released His faith in words...To imitate God, you must talk like Him and act like Him...The natural world is to be controlled by man speaking God's words."

These teachers claim that the spoken words of believers activate God. When we don't use our words to activate God, He can't help us. When we use our confession according to the proper formulas, He's obligated to act on our behalf.

One writer goes so far as to say, "Faith is God's source of power. You are in control! So, if man has control, who no longer has it? God." That's actually a quote from a study Bible!

What a different picture we get from the Bible itself. We don't order God around. We don't tell God what to do. We're supposed to be humble before Him.

Word of Faith teaching says that God must respond to our words in the way we want.

Flip over to Luke 18 for just a minute. **Read Luke 18:14**

Acts 20:19 *...serving the Lord with all humility...*

Colossians 3:12 *Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility...*

James 4:6 *God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*

James 4:10 *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*

1Peter 5:5, 6 *... be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.*

We're not little gods. We don't control creation. We certainly don't command God to do our bidding. We're to always remember that God is the sovereign Lord of the universe and believers are His children.

We're rightful heirs to the throne of God but only because of His grace. We should be humbled because without God we're lost, we're hopeless, and we're headed for hell.

All that we have and are and ever will be we owe to God.

He holds our very breath in His hand. We're all just a heartbeat away from eternity.

Anyone who's realized their own sin and has trusted Jesus Christ as Savior should be the most humble person on earth.

This centurion was humble. He said, *"I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof."*

Is that your attitude today when it comes to Jesus Christ, or kind of take Him for granted? I hear people use the name of Jesus Christ as a swear word and I think, "Wow, what arrogance. How smug. How pretentious."

Angels fall at His feet in His presence and puny mortals dare to curse His name.

Now hopefully most of us wouldn't do that. But that doesn't mean we're immune from pride.

Go back to Luke chapter 9

Jesus has just finished taking Peter, James and John up on the Mt of Transfiguration. They've seen Jesus in all of His glory. He's just told the 12 what's going to happen to him.

Read 9:44. Now look at this: **Read 9:46**

Pride is an ugly thing, isn't it? And none of us are immune. Jesus closest disciples weren't immune from pride. The dictionary defines *pride* as: *An excessively high opinion of oneself; conceit.*

Humility sees God as the sovereign Lord. Pride puts us in His place. Humility allows us to give control over to Him. Pride demands its own way.

Mark Buchanan, has a book titled *Your God is Too Safe*. In it he writes about the Genesis account of Cain and Abel. Cain brought God an offering of produce because he was a farmer. He brought a beautiful party platter. Abel brought a slaughtered sheep because he was a shepherd. Abel brought a not so pretty bloody sacrifice.

And God accepted the sheep and not the produce because from the beginning he required a blood sacrifice. From the beginning God wanted people to understand that the wages of sin is death.

Cain was despondent over God's rejection so God says to him, "*Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?*" Today we wouldn't say "Why is your countenance fallen (literally why is your face fallen)." We'd say, "Why are you down in the mouth."

"Why do you look so depressed?" God says, "*If you do well, will you not be accepted?*"

Buchanan writes, "'If you do what it is right, it will go well with you.' What will go well? I would like this to mean God will stay the hand of death, disease, of accident and injury and illness, always, everywhere, right to the sweet gentle end, for me and those I love."

"But of course, it doesn't necessarily mean the idyllic, undisturbed life. That might happen. It might not. That is not important to whether it goes well with you. God's definition of it going well is unique, distinct, almost eccentric. His definition of wellness is not about health, finances, or job security. It's not about unfailing protection from the vagaries and dangers of a broken world. It's not about life being fair."

"It's about acceptance. It's about God accepting us as His own, the one He loves. It's not about being spared from untimely or difficult death. It's about being spared the 'second death'--the death of unbridgeable separation, the death that is at once coldness and burning, oblivion and torment, and the desolation of unending aloneness."

"Because of Jesus Christ, we have received God's unmerited favor. If we do what is right it will go well with us. The right thing is faith- to have faith in the one who doesn't always remedy life's unfairness but who does far better; He redeems it."

"Today, He says to repentant thieves, to trusting Abels, to dying children, "Today you shall be with me in paradise."

"Ultimately, we are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly await a Savior from there. But meanwhile, in the shadow lands, we walk by faith and not by sight."

“If you walk and don't faint, you find what Job did—*though he slay me, yet will I trust him*. You find that the God who walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death is infinitely better than the dull, safe god who lulls us on borderland, seducing us with false comforts, spinning a cocoon around us that doesn't protect, only entraps, and from which we emerge wingless.”

Humility says, “Lord...I am not worthy. I accept your perfect will for my life.” Pride says, “God, I refuse to trust you because I don't like the way my life is going.”

The centurion didn't demand what he saw as fairness. He only showed simple reverence. The Centurion knew his place. He demonstrated faith by acknowledging that he didn't deserve anything. He was humble.

I. True Faith Acts In Simple Reverence

II. True Faith Acts In Humility

III. True Faith Acts In Submission

The Centurion understood Jesus' authority.

Back to Luke 7 Read verses 7b-8 *But say the word, and my servant will be healed.* (Plus verse 8)

The centurion had a good grasp on the meaning of authority. The centurion was a man of authority himself. But he was quick to recognize something. His authority was limited but Jesus' authority wasn't. Jesus' authority was infinitely greater than the centurion's.

So, the centurion doesn't mention his own authority, except to illustrate why Jesus doesn't need be personally present to heal his servant.

A man of authority only needs speak the word. The centurion had concluded from the reports he had heard that Jesus was a man of greatest authority. He even had authority over nature. So, He could order sickness to leave and it would, whether or not He was there in person.

He also recognized that Jesus' authority, like his own, was the result of a higher authority ("I myself am a man under authority," v. 7). A man of authority, like the centurion, could quickly recognize and appreciate the superior authority of Jesus.

This centurion was submissive. He knew his place and he knew his limitations. That's an important lesson for all of to learn. Knowing our limitations can make the difference between eternal life and eternal death.

Many years ago Joe Ermann shared his testimony here. Joe earned All-America honors in 1970. He was a first round draft pick by the Baltimore Colts in 1973, where he played from 1973-80. He finished his pro career playing for the Detroit Lions.

Joe was rich, famous, had all the wine, women and song he thought he wanted. Joe said, I was in control. I had power. Then my younger brother was diagnosed with cancer. Suddenly all my money, all my fame, all my power over others was exposed for what it was; impotent, ineffective, feeble.

He said, "I realized that I actually had no power. My brother died and I was powerless to stop it."

That, along with the faithful witness of other players, brought Joe to Christ. Twenty five years ago Joe started up a ministry to Baltimore City children and families called "The Door."

The centurion was submissive to the One who had power far greater than any he'd ever have. He knew his limitations.

You may be a person of authority. In the military, or in your job. You might be the captain of a sports team at school. You may be successful and other people look up to you. There's nothing wrong with that at all. If that's where you are, do the best job possible. But don't get so caught up with yourself that you don't acknowledge God.

You wouldn't be where you are today if it wasn't for God. And if He so chooses He can change your circumstances just like that! But more importantly, only He has the power to forgive your sin, to fill your life with His fullness, and to give you the gift of eternal life.

This centurion was reverent, humble and submissive. That's the kind of spirit God calls all of us to have.

Those characteristics ought to be common in light of who God is, and how He's revealed Himself through His Word, and what He's done for us in Christ. But you know, they're not.

In fact look at this: **read verse 9**

The word translated “marveled,” *thaumazo*, is also translated “amazed.” “astonished,” “surprised.” What does it take to amaze God? What does it take to surprise Jesus?

Jesus marveled at a Roman centurion, whose background and circumstances should’ve made it almost impossible for him to have faith. A man whose occupation valued fierceness and the ability to rely on yourself, a man whose background was paganism, a man hated by the Jews because he was a Roman. Yet, despite all the circumstances that went against him, this man had faith.

Steve Zeisler writes: “Faith is an important subject. All of God's Word bears witness to that fact, and Jesus' words here emphasize the importance of the subject of faith. Let me suggest a brief definition of faith: Faith is a willingness to bet your very life, and eternity itself, on the promises and character of God.”

David Gooding explains it this way:

“Physical healing is always a shadow of the spiritual reality of the spiritual healing our world needs through Jesus Christ. Moving from the kingdom of death to the kingdom of life...”

“Faith, according to this story, is not confidence that we have done the best we could, that God will assess our merits generously; faith is abandoning trust in our works and merit and any thought of deserving salvation, and relying totally and without reserve on the person of Christ and the authority of his word.”

Now after all that, comes verse 10. Verse 10 is totally anticlimactic.

Read verse 10

Luke, the historian, adds, “Oh yeah, by the way, when they got home they found the servant healed.” That was an “of course,” matter-of-fact comment about the healing.

There are a lot of voices out there in this dark world telling us what to do... most of them can't be trusted.

God calls us to have faith. Faith will navigate us through life's greatest problems if we can just get three things right...Reverence, Humility, and Submission to God.

Faith is a willingness to bet your very life, and eternity itself, on the promises and character of God.

Who's got more faith?

You, sitting here in a great church with a complete Bible in your own language, with teaching and resources for learning about God's truth all around you, or a 1st century man with a pagan background and only the Old Testament to instruct him?

You know what I believe the goal of this church should be? To make Jesus marvel. To surprise the Son of God. To make Him say, *I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Gambrills.*