

Two Sons

We are in chapter 7 of Luke. This is our series from the Words of Jesus in Luke that we are calling *Church in the Red*, because some Bibles print the Words of Jesus in red letters.

I'm calling this message *Two Sons* because there is the account of Jesus healing two men. They aren't, precisely, two sons; you'll see what I mean as we get into the text.

Chapter seven starts with this:

When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum.

By *all this*, Luke means the sermon that Jesus just preached, the teachings of Jesus that we just wrapped up in chapter 6... a sermon that revealed that the Gospel Jesus preached and the Kingdom that He was bringing was different than anything they imagined or experienced.

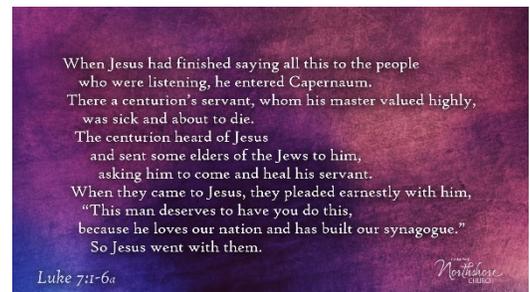
² There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.¹

A *servant*, of course, is not a **son**. Perhaps you have a Bible open, and your translation says *slave*. That is a good translation of the word too. Again, not precisely a *son*.

What do you think of when you hear, or read, word like *servant* or *slave*? While we don't have a lot of details about the relationship between this man and the centurion, it may not be precisely like the relationship we think of when we think of a *slave*.

Perhaps we think of a *slave* along the lines of the slavery in our own Nation's past. Perhaps we think of a slave as part of an agricultural enterprise, merely a piece of the machinery... a harvesting implement with no relationship, a valuable, yet expendable, dehumanized part.

Perhaps we think of *servant* in other terms.



¹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:1-2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Anyone watch Downton Abbey? The servants served as a vital part of that story, just as they played a vital part of the enterprise of the estate. While not exactly *slaves*, these servants were nearly as bound to that enterprise as slaves. While not technically enslaved, it was a position that was difficult to escape.



Furthermore, these servants were, in many ways, members of an extended family. They were not sons and daughters... but they were something *like* sons and daughters.

I don't mean to romanticize the text, but I suspect that the centurion's household was something more like the Abbey, and the relationship between the centurion and the servants was something more like those relationships.

The servant was part of the centurion's urban household. Not merely a cog in the centurion's enterprise; the centurion had soldiers for that work (a hundred or so soldiers; that is why he was called a *centurion*. That is what the *cent* in centurion means: 100. A century has 100 years; a centurion has 100 soldiers.)

With those considerations, if you will allow me, I'm calling this one a sort of *son*.

It is interesting that, while Jesus doesn't condone or sanction the relationship, neither does Jesus condemn it. That isn't license for us to approve of such servitude (especially in our contexts)... but it also isn't the point of the text.

It says that the centurion "highly valued" the servant; I suspect that this is more than value for his work as a slave... but value in a more relational, even *familial*, way.

³ The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man **deserves** to have you do this, ⁵ because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."²

The centurion embodied the Roman Empire in the city (Capernaum). He was the intermediary between the locals and the occupying Empire. The centurion was a Roman citizen and Gentile (a foreigner, not a Jew). Perhaps most importantly, he was a **politician** who would have formed intentional, strategic alliances with the local leaders (the Jewish elders).

He built the synagogue in Capernaum. That wasn't unusual. The centurion was a politician who would have indebted the locals to him by this sort of patronage (I

² [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:3-5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

build the synagogue; you keep the peace). He may have even joined the locals in religious practice; politicians do that, you know.

The testimony of the Jewish elders said that the centurion “loves our nation” which, when added to the rest of the story, indicates that this centurion was a man of at least some faith; it appears that he developed sincere faith in the God of the Jews, even though he was an outsider.

The elders made a case, “so Jesus went with them.”

I’m fairly certain that the elders thought they had convinced Jesus with their well-reasoned plea, that Jesus was coming out of obligation to them and the centurion. But I doubt that their argument had any impact on Jesus.

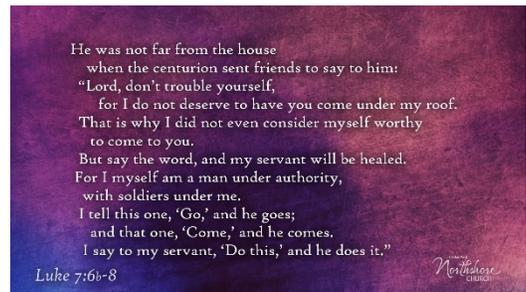
1. This sort of obligation was in direct opposition to what Jesus was teaching. Jesus did not preach a *quid pro quo*. Jesus did not preach that His love and work and miracles were in response to, or payment for, good work or righteousness. That may be religion, but it is not the Gospel. And,
2. Jesus clearly had another agenda in mind, as we’ll see unfold in the account.

He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. ³

The centurion understood Jewish custom. He knew that Jesus would defile Himself, according to Jewish law, if he crossed that religious barrier and entered the Gentile’s house.

Notice that the centurion recognized Jesus as **Lord**. That may seem pretty normal to us, since we know Jesus as Lord, even unbelievers are familiar with, and use, the term. But that is highly unusual in this context. The centurion was **lord** in this situation; he was the one with power and authority. But, curiously (perhaps amazingly), the centurion recognized Jesus as One with authority, even superior authority. He said:

But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” ⁴



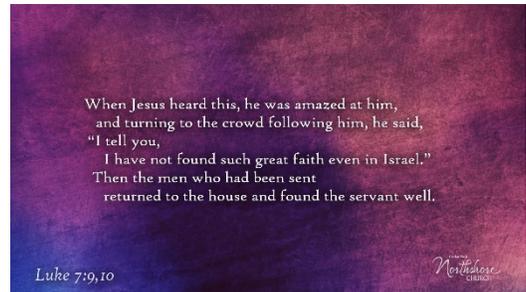
³ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:6–7). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁴ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:7–8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Say the word, Jesus. This centurion appeared to have an understanding of Jesus that surpassed even the followers of Jesus. He certainly understood Jesus better than the Jewish elders, and perhaps better than the disciples who were with Jesus.

⁹ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel."⁵

What a moment. Here was this crowd, presumably filled with those who had heard Jesus teach. They were likely those who had seen Jesus heal, or at least knew of it. In that crowd were those Jesus had called to be His Disciples, ones who would become Apostles of the Church. Yet, Jesus said that the faith He saw in that centurion, a man that Jesus had not even met personally, one whom Jesus only knew through intermediaries... this centurion's faith was greater than anything Jesus had yet seen, including in those right there in the crowd.



Is anyone like me? Don't you hate it when you realize that the ones you think are outsiders demonstrate greater faith than we who carry the titles and do the religious stuff? God, forgive us of our foolish righteousness.

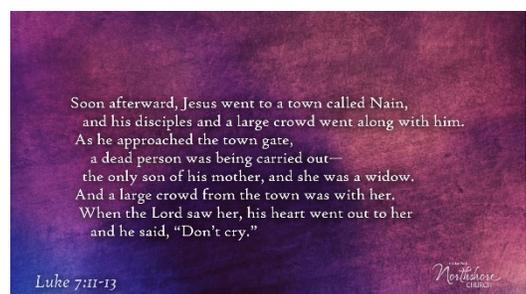
¹⁰ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. ⁶

There is no record of any great ceremony, incantation, or prayer. There isn't even any record that Jesus *said the word*. Perhaps Jesus merely agreed. Perhaps Jesus merely nodded, and it was done. No fanfare. No frills. No fantastic displays. Just Jesus.

With verse 11, the narrative takes us to the account of the second son.

¹¹ Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him.⁷

Nain is a full-day's walk, perhaps a couple of days, from Capernaum. It is uphill, near Nazareth, toward Jerusalem (all real places, by the way, reminding us that this is not some sort of fairytale).



⁵ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:9). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:10). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁷ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:11). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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. And a large crowd from the town was with her.⁸

This is a sad scene. Perhaps it hits a little too close to home as news reports include unimaginable scenes as the dead are being attended to in cities hardest hit by covid-19. We are not, should not be, accustomed to seeing refrigerated trucks parked next to New-York-City hospitals to serve as overflow morgues, or coffins stacked in Italian churches. There is a lot of grief in our world today.

There was grief in this scene too, albeit there was only the one dead. What made the scene especially tragic was that it was “the only son of his mother, and she was a widow.” In her context, that meant she was likely hopeless. She was without a husband which put her in the care of her son, and now her son was gone too.

¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”⁹

- It wasn’t a “don’t cry” because it wasn’t a cry-worthy scenario.
- It wasn’t a “don’t cry” because she somehow deserved this terrible situation.
- It wasn’t a “don’t cry” because it made Jesus and the others uncomfortable.
- It wasn’t a “don’t cry” because it showed her weakness or lack of faith.

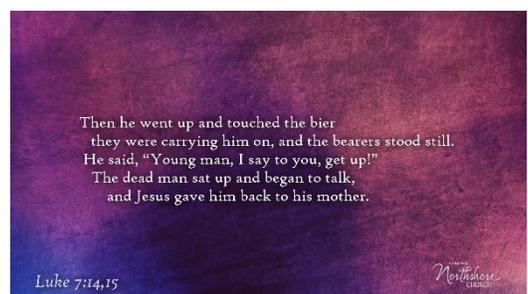
It was a “don’t cry” because Jesus had an answer.

Let’s be careful when we might say to someone “don’t cry.” Sometimes there isn’t an immediate answer. Sometimes the best thing we can do is be **with** the one suffering; sometimes, especially when there is not much more to do, it is best to take a moment and cry with a person.

But, in this case, Jesus had an answer. Jesus said “don’t cry” because He knew that there would soon be no reason to cry. He knew that mourning would be replaced with rejoicing.

¹⁴ Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!”¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.¹⁰

Jesus started by doing the unthinkable, making Himself ceremonially unclean by touching the bier (not by touching a beer; that is a relatively recent invention by holiness Christians). This was likely a wooden plank upon



⁸ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹⁰ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:14–15). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

which the body was laid (perhaps in the clothes in which he died, or maybe covered with a cloth), not the sort of thing common in our culture, but we see this sort of thing in other cultures when a body is taken to burial placed on a sort of pallet and carried through the streets, often with a crowd, to a cemetery.

The young man was likely not dead all that long since it was a warm climate and there would not have been any sort of embalming. He may have died earlier that day.

Here, Jesus **said the word**. He didn't pray, like we might, asking God to do a miracle. Jesus had authority to simply *say the word*.

Seeing the dead man raised was remarkable enough, but seeing that dead one alive again by the Word and Authority of Jesus alone... that would have been awe inspiring. And that is what it says:

¹⁶They were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said.

¹¹

They were recognizing Jesus as the Promised Prophet. Moses said there would be a Prophet like this. Only the Messiah has such power and authority.

The miracle resulted in **praise**. And the miracle resulted in **hope**. They exclaimed:

God has come to help his people¹²

In these days when it is easy for anxiety to creep in, when situations may seem hopeless, when disease threatens us, and when the far-reaching impacts of the disease touch us all, damaging economies and employment and such... friend **there is hope**. God does come to help.

The miracles did what miracles are supposed to do, they resulted in worship (praise to God) and they resulted in testimony as

news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country. ¹³

These two accounts give us some important takeaways for today.

First, we see that Jesus crosses barriers. Who were the primary recipients of the miracles? There is no doubt that the one who was formerly dead, and the one who was about to die, were miraculously touched, and changed, by Jesus. But neither

¹¹ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹² [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

¹³ [The New International Version](#). (2011). (Lk 7:17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

of these two sons were really the focus. It was the centurion and the widow. These were both **outsiders** to that religious culture.

The centurion was a Gentile, not a Jew. Furthermore, the centurion was the *oppressor*; he would have been considered the *enemy* (at least the local embodiment of the enemy).

The woman was a widow without a son. She was considered worthless in that ancient context.

Yet Jesus made them His focus. To Jesus there was no insider or outsider. With these miracles He taught an important lesson to both insiders and outsiders.

If you feel like an *outsider*, know that Jesus doesn't see you that way.

If you feel like an *insider*, know that Jesus doesn't back that perspective either.

Jesus doesn't see things in terms of insiders and outsiders; neither should we.

A **second** takeaway, especially from the first account, is this: Jesus crosses distances. Isn't that good to know in these days of distancing? I've always known it, always have been glad to pray with and for people at a distance. But these days *at-a-distance* is all we have, at least for the coming weeks. We have never relied more on our phones and such. I've never led an online prayer meeting until these days. I'm glad for the technology... but I am even more glad for the reminder that **distance is meaningless for Jesus**.

Just as Jesus could *say the word* on the way to the centurion's house, Jesus is with us as we are physically distant from our friends and family. That physical distance is nothing to Jesus. And that is a powerful reminder in these days.

To Jesus, there is no such thing as *distancing*.

A **third** takeaway: Jesus cares. These accounts remind us that Jesus cares.

Maybe we wonder, where is God in all this? Why would God allow covid-19? Why would God allow disease at all? If Jesus has authority and power, why not heal all those who are sick and rebuke the disease?

I don't know.

But I do know that *He didn't*, even when He walked the earth. We know that He did heal and raise the dead, just as it is written in the passage. But just that fact that He encountered these demonstrates that He didn't just go to prayer one morning and rid the world of sickness, disease, and dying. He didn't do it then; and He doesn't do it now... at least not yet.

That is a promise for eternity. That is a promise for a New Heaven and New Earth. That is the promise for restoration, a promise for an eternity like Eden before it was wrecked by sin.

But in these days, we can still know that Jesus cares. He cared for those in these accounts, and He cares for you, and me, and all of those around us. Jesus shared in our suffering. Jesus knows. Jesus cares.

So, we pray, trusting God for the answer. Perhaps it will be a miracle of healing, or perhaps it will be a miracle of provision, or perhaps a miracle of comfort and day-to-day strength. We trust Jesus, and His care for us.

A **fourth** and final takeaway: the works of Jesus bring glory to God.

These accounts remind us that Jesus is at work to inspire worship and praise... and to spread His Good News. That is the point of God's work in and through our lives. Let's be on the lookout for God's work in and through us. Let's take every opportunity to see Jesus work in and through our lives. And let's be sure to thank God, praise God, and *get the word out*... letting people see God's work in and through us.

Would you pray with me for a moment, responding to God's Word today?

Father, as humbly as that centurion looked to Jesus, we come knowing that we don't deserve anything good from you. Yet we know that You hear our call and respond with love.

Jesus, help us to hear when you *say the word*. When you say peace. When you say comfort. When you say strength, and hope, and health, and mercy and grace. Say the word.

For those who have not tuned our ears and hearts to hear... give us gifts of faith to believe. Jesus we believe, help us to trust you and believe you more today.

Thank You Jesus that there is no barrier You won't cross. Thank You that there is no distance that means anything to You. Help us to believe and act likewise.

We thank You, and pray in the Name Above All Names, Jesus. Amen.