

The Authority of Jesus' Word
Luke 7:1-17
Key Verse: 7:7b
by Kevin Albright

"But say the word, and my servant will be healed."

In our last two studies of Luke's gospel, we heard Jesus' heavenly teachings. Jesus concluded that to be wise builders we must put his words into practice. Today's passage includes two events: Jesus heals a centurion's dying servant and Jesus raises a widow's dead son to life again. We can see that Jesus is the Great Physician. Jesus has the life-giving power of God. Especially, Jesus' word has the power and authority of God to heal the sick and to raise the dead. Jesus' word still has power to save, to heal and to give life today. Whether or not we believe his word makes the difference whether or not we experience his salvation.

1. "Lord...say the word" (1-10)

Look at verse 1. After Jesus' wonderful sermon which both inspired and challenged his listeners to the core, he entered Capernaum. Already in Capernaum Jesus had driven the evil spirit out of a man in the synagogue on the Sabbath (4:31,35). It was also in Capernaum that he had healed the paralytic man who came through the roof (Mk 2:1).

Look at verses 2-3. "There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant." Luke introduces a certain centurion. A centurion was a Roman army officer, well-trained as a military leader and in charge of 100 soldiers. He worked his way up to his commanding position through obedience to his senior officers and through valor and skill in battle. This centurion, however, was unusual. We can learn four blessed qualities from this man.

First, we learn about seeing others with compassion. The first unusual thing about him is that he highly valued his dying servant. It is well-documented that servants at that time were regarded as little more than possessions, like an ox or donkey. If a servant got sick, the master usually abandoned or sold

off the servant for a low price, like a junk car. But this centurion valued his servant highly. He cared for his servant like a family member. He wasn't too busy or too important to ignore his dying servant. Rather, he was concerned about his servant's life. Compassion means to 'suffer together' with someone. Here it is good to ask ourselves: Do I have compassion for others, or am I like a 9 to 5 hired hand in my relations with others? Last Friday, we heard Jesse Foreso's sincere testimony, how he was moved when several church members visited him in the hospital. He was not dying, but still he was moved by others' loving concern and prayers for him.

Second, we learn about his broad love for others. Verses 4-5 tell us more about this centurion. The Jewish elders he sent to Jesus came to Jesus and pleaded earnestly with Jesus saying, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." Normally, Jews did not speak highly of Gentiles, but rather despised them. But here we see that they genuinely respected and honored this man, appreciating his kindness and service to their Jewish community. Obviously, this centurion did not do this for merely political reasons, to get on the good side of his subjects. The Jewish elders testified that he loved the Jewish people and sacrificed his own expenses to build their community synagogue. To be sure, most Romans despised Jews, and most Jews despised Romans. It is our fallen human nature that we look with suspicion and fear upon others who look, dress or speak differently than ourselves. Divisions of race, ethnicity and politics are responsible for so many wars on earth, between nations, even within the same country. But here was a man who looked beyond race and power. In him, we see the vision of the promise contained in the gospel of salvation for all people, both Gentile and Jew. Revelation 5:9-10 says of Jesus, the Lamb, "...with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation."

Third, we learn of humility. When Jesus heard the Jewish elders deliver the centurion's pleading message, Jesus went with them. Then another message came when Jesus was not far from the house. The centurion sent friends to say to Jesus, "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you." This was a Roman centurion with power and authority. He could have threatened Jesus if he didn't come and help him. Instead, he was sorry for the trouble it would cause Jesus for a Jew to enter a Gentile's house to heal his sick servant. He said to Jesus, "I do not deserve." He considered himself unworthy. How often we demand or insist on our rights or expect

respect from others! This man shows us a glimpse of the humility of Jesus. Philippians 2:6-8 says of Jesus: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!"

Fourth, we learn of great faith. What impressed Jesus most about the centurion was not his compassion, not his broad love, and not his humility. It was his faith. Let's read verse 7b together, our key verse: "But say the word, and my servant will be healed." This centurion believed that Jesus did not have to come and touch his dying servant, nor did Jesus even have to see him. This centurion believed that if Jesus just said the words, "Your servant is healed," it would be done. And he used his own experience with authority to confirm his faith. He said, "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." This centurion understood human authority well. If his commanding legion officer gave him a command, he obeyed without hesitation or argument. If he gave a command to one of his soldiers or servants, that person would obey him without question. In the same way, he believed that Jesus was Lord over his servant's disease. If Jesus just said, "Be healed," his servant would live. This man believed that Jesus' word has absolute authority to give life and to heal.

What did Jesus think about this centurion's attitude? Let's read verse 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.'" Then the men returned and found the servant well. It was not a coincidence. Jesus' word and Jesus' will healed the centurion's dying servant. Notice how Jesus was impressed by the centurion. Jesus was amazed at this man for his faith in Jesus' word. In contrast to this, in Mark 6:5, Jesus was amazed at his hometown people's lack of faith. As a result, his hometown people did not receive much healing help from Jesus. In light of this, we see that we can either amaze Jesus with our faith or with our lack of faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Without faith, we become the devil's prey. Without faith, we become losers in eternity. In contrast to this, with faith in Jesus, we become victors who overcome the world and who can experience the power of God. Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of

everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." The word of Jesus has power to heal us and to save others.

Mike Thompson grew up in an unstable family and lived an irresponsible life. He studied the Bible, accepted Jesus and became a new creation. Through Jesus' command to go and make disciples of all nations, he had a vision to one day be a missionary to Russia. This week, about 20 years later, he moved to St. Petersburg, Russia as a missionary, with his two younger children, Charles and Ruth.

We know well the story of an American woman missionary who went to Korea in obedience to Jesus' world mission command. On the trip over, she said she wondered what she could offer the Korean people. She concluded that she had nothing to give them except the word of God. The word of God was enough. Through Bible study, many Koreans came to believe the gospel and received world mission vision. In time, through the ministry God helped her to begin, God has sent over 1500 Korean people to go out as missionaries to other nations, including many among us in Chicago.

There are so many true stories, past and present, of the life-changing power of the word of God in the Bible, the gospel of Jesus Christ. What is your story? Has the word of God healed you? Has the word of God saved and changed your life? Not only this, will you depend on the word of God to save, heal and change others around you? The words of popular talk shows will not save them. The teachings of worldly intellectuals will not heal and help them permanently. But Jesus' word has power and authority to save, to heal and to give life.

Catholics are familiar with the following words, echoed by the Roman centurion: "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed." These words are true. Because of our sins, no one is worthy to receive Jesus. But if Jesus says the word, we are healed. We can learn from the centurion to pray not only for ourselves: "but say the word, and my servant will be healed." Let's include those who are lost or sick or dying in our prayers. We all know of people in these conditions. Let's pray for them: Lord Jesus, say the word, and _____ shall be healed (fill in the blank). Let's pray to grow in compassion, broad love and humility. Let's pray earnestly in faith to our Mighty Lord, who is able and compassionate to save and to heal.

2. "Young man...get up!" (11-17)

Only Luke's gospel records the event in verses 11-17, which is one of the three times that Jesus raises a person from the dead. The story begins with two processions. Look at verse 11. The first procession is Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd with them entering a town called Nain. Verse 12 describes a very different procession: "As [Jesus] 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." In one group, there was Jesus, the Lord of healing and new life. In the other group was a sorrowing widow probably dressed in black, heading to the cemetery to bury her only son. Imagine newlyweds Tom and Ana or Joshua and Graciela, driving away with a "Just Married" sign on the car window and cans jingling from ropes. Now imagine they have to wait at an intersection for a long procession of vehicles with FUNERAL signs on the front windows. Which procession would win the mood over? I dare say that, out of respect, the funeral would normally prevail and the mood would turn somber.

This woman had sorrow upon sorrow. Not only had she lost her husband, but now she lost her only son. To be sure, her only son was her joy of living, especially after her husband passed away. But now he was gone. It is quite sure that when her son died, her joy of living also died. Who could comfort such a woman? Not even her sister or best friend could console her.

How did Jesus see her? Look at verse 13. "When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Don't cry.'" How could Jesus say, "Don't cry," to a woman in her situation? It seems insensitive or unsympathetic. It would seem more comforting to offer a shoulder to cry on. But Jesus wasn't using psychology to brighten her day with his words. Jesus said, "Don't cry," because Jesus saves us from sorrow. Without Jesus, life is one sob story after another. With Jesus, we have hope and the promise of eternal life.

Jesus did not stop there. Jesus proved to her that she had sufficient reason not to cry. Look at verse 14. "Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up!'" At first, when Jesus touched the coffin, they must've thought that Jesus wanted to pay his last respects to this widow's dead son, sharing her sorrow. The coffin was open. Jesus looked at the dead man. But to their astonishment,

Jesus did not cry or speak words of sympathy. Jesus spoke to the dead man saying, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" Perhaps some scoffed at his words or began to laugh. If so, their unbelief was short-lived.

Look at verse 15. "The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother." Dead men do not normally sit up, move or talk at all. That is a fact of death. But Jesus is not bound by facts or physics. Who is Jesus that he commands even the dead to sit up? In the Bible, other men raised the dead. Elijah and Elisha raised the dead. Peter and Paul raised the dead. But they did not do so by their own power or will. They did so by the power of God through prayer and God's good will. Who is Jesus that he commands the dead in his own authority to live again? He is the Anointed Son of the living God. Peter called him the author of life (Ac 3:15). Paul said, "all things were created by him and for him" (Col 1:16). Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (Jn 11:25-26)

Jesus took away the widow's sorrow and restored her joy. Jesus is the joy of living. Jesus is the Lord of life. Jesus is our hope and salvation. Jesus is good news of great joy for all people. The people were all filled with awe and praised God. They recognized Jesus as a great prophet. They saw this act as God coming to help his people. News of Jesus spread all the more.

Jesus gives life to the dead. All people need life--spiritual life. Jesus gives new birth to all who believe in him. John 1:12 promises, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right [or power] to become children of God." 1 John 5:12 says, "Whoever has the Son [of God] has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

I know a joyful man, actually two, who were known as sorrowful men, though they were handsome and bright students. Their sins made them like dead men. Now I see them as two of the most joyful people I know. How were they changed? Jesus made them alive through his word and Spirit. Jesus still makes the dead alive, through his living word and Holy Spirit.

Through the work of his word and the guidance of his Spirit, God has raised up 8 new fellowship leaders among us. Let's pray for them to keep growing in faith in Jesus' word like this centurion. Let's also pray for our European International Bible conference this week. Especially, let's pray for the 6 main messengers to speak the word of God with great faith. When we look

at our own nation, we are plagued with many sins and maladies, such as pleasure-seeking and broken families. With God's word in Exodus 19:5-6 and 1 Peter 2:9, we have prayed persistently for North America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. How can this happen? It is happening as Jesus gives healing and life through his word and Spirit one person at a time.

Today we reviewed two events which testify to Jesus' power to heal and to give life to the dead. There is power and authority in Jesus' word. John 5:24 agrees with this. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." Jesus' word heals and gives life. This is good news for us. We can believe Jesus' word not only for ourselves, but for others as well. We can pray for others and share the good news of Christ's salvation, testifying to how Christ has healed us and given us life and many others as well, both past and present. Let's come humbly to Jesus our Great Physician. Let's trust in Jesus, the God who gives life to the dead, knowing that his word still gives life.