

## “How Great is Your Faith?”

Luke 7:1-8:3

**Intro/FCF:** When I was a little kid, I loved summer vacation. I can remember our family loading up our navy Ford Escort with sunscreen, beach towels, sand castle building equipment, and floaties and then traveling from Kentucky down to Florida to go to the beach. As a little boy, my eyes were naturally fixed on the sand and the seashells and the waves, and because of my limited perspective, I did not have a clue how HUGE the ocean really is. Even as a teenager I can remember going back and wading out into the ocean to see how far I could make it from shore. You’ve done this, right? You go through some small waves and the water rises to your waist. You plow through some more waves, and the water climbs up to your shoulders, and then before you know it, you are tiptoeing trying to keep your head above water. And you are in the ocean, “WAY OUT” in to the ocean, right? You are one-hundred and eighty feet from shore and five and a half feet deep. FIVE AND A HALF FEET DEEP in the OCEAN. But as we grow up, our perspective changes. Now, when I stand on the ocean’s shore and look out over the horizon, a sense of awe grabs me when I consider its vastness and greatness, because I now know that its deepest point reaches not FIVE AND A HALF FEET but 36,200 feet deep at the Mariana Trench in the Pacific Ocean.

One of my greatest personal fears and one of my greatest fears for this church is that we would wade out into the ocean of faith and tell ourselves we are WAY OUT into this thing only to discover that are 180 feet from the shore and five and a half feet deep. Luke 7 is a chapter that teaches us a lot about faith. It will challenge us to have a deeper view of Christ and a deeper, greater faith in him. As we work our way through this chapter, I want you to answer this question: “**How great is your faith?**”

Read along with me as we dive into Luke 7:1-10.

**The Point: Disciples of Christ exercise dynamic faith in their dynamic Savior.**

**[DEF:]** Faith is the air we breathe as Christians. It is how we get down and do what we do on a daily basis. Paul sums it up by saying in 2 Cor. 5:7, “we walk by faith, not by sight..”

Trans: If faith is so central to our lives, what does this chapter teach us about faith? I want to give us three encouragements from Luke 7 this morning. Number one...

### **I. Place great faith in the authority of Christ (7:1-17).**

- Story: Centurion (100 soldiers under. Sick Servant, at the point of death.. So he sends for Jesus...)
- Verse 4 tells us when the Jewish leaders got to Jesus, they began lobbying for the centurion: “**He is worthy** to have you do this for him. [Why?] For he loves our nation, and he is the one who built our synagogue.” The Jewish leaders say: “C’mon Jesus. He’s a ‘good guy.’ He’s been generous to our people. If anyone deserves this, it’s him.”
- But look at the message the centurion sends to Jesus in v. 6. “*Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.*”
- Did you notice his humility? The elders said, “He is worthy;” the centurion says, “I am not worthy.” There is no presumption or sense of entitlement. He has a proper view of himself. **[P]** When he looked in the mirror, he did not see anything special or admirable that should cause Jesus to feel obligated to fulfill his request.
- A humble heart provides the soil where *great* faith is cultivated.
- Not only did the centurion possess humility... When we look at the rest of the centurion’s message to Jesus, we discover his remarkable faith. The key issue here is the stunning faith the centurion places in the authority of Christ.
- **DEF:** J. I. Packer says, “Authority is a relational word which signifies the right to rule.” When we talk about the absolute authority of Christ we mean that his word and his will carry decisive force.
- Look at verses 7 and 8, “[*Jesus, you just*] say the word, and let my servant be healed. [This statement is profound for two reasons: #1) He believed Jesus was not bound by spatial or geographic limitations. In effect he says, “Jesus you can exercise your authority anywhere.” #2) He believed all Jesus needed to do was say a word. . . He didn’t to show up, touch him, say abracadabra, nothing . . . but say the word! Why was he so confident? Because he understood authority.] **8** For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”
- Do you see the centurion’s appeal? He moves from the lesser (himself) to the greater (Jesus) saying, “I know what it means to be under authority, and I know what it means to exercise authority. My soldiers act according to my command. When I say ‘Go.’ They go. When I say, ‘Come.’ They come. When I say, ‘Do this.’ They do that.” With these words the centurion cast himself completely upon the divine authority of Christ.

The Bible has a lot to say about . . . **The Absolute Authority of Christ.** Here’s what we see:

- Jesus Christ has all authority **over unclean spirits** (Lk 4:32) and **demonic forces** (Lk 9:1); he has all authority over all **sickness & disease** (Lk 7:10). **His word and teaching have authority** (Mt 7:29). He has **the authority to give someone else authority** (Jn. 19:11); Jesus has the authority **to forgive sins** (Mt 9:6) and **to judge** (Jn 5:27). He has all authority over **every human being** (Jn. 17:2) [You may feel like you have the ultimate authority in your life, but in reality, Jesus has the ultimate authority over us.]; Jesus has all authority over **life and death** (From birth to death Jesus keeps our hearts pulsating

with life.). And to put this in even greater perspective (if all that wasn't enough): the **authority of Christ upholds the universe** (Heb. 1:3).

- **EXPERI:** Jesus is the ultimate shot caller. He is King over all things, so let me ask you... How big, how powerful is your Christ? There is no limit to his power and ability. Just look at **verses 11-17**...
- Heal the sick? Check. Forgive sin? Check. Raise the dead? Check! Jesus has *all* authority.
- Are you believing God *for anything*? What have you prayed for that goes well beyond your expectation of how God typically works? If someone took inventory of your prayer life over the past month, what conclusions would they draw about the power of God? This understanding should move us to go to God frequently, to believe he is unlimited in power, and to know we can never ask too much from him.
- **APP:** Now before we move on, let's pause and ask: Where else in Scripture is the authority of Christ so prominent? Answer: The Great Commission! **CR:** Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, he came to his disciples and said: "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**"
- **The authority of Christ is BIG enough for the mission of Christ.**
- **App:** Pour your life into someone else for their spiritual good. Show them what it looks like to follow Christ and teach them how they too can have the satisfying life Christ offers. [Multiply...]

#### Now... what happens when we exercise this kind of faith?

- Check Jesus' response in verse 9: *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."*
- The text says, "Jesus marveled at him." This should stop us in our tracks. JESUS marvels at this *man's* faith. He was amazed and astonished. Jesus loves this kind of Faith. The statement that follows should jump off the page like a neon light. "Not even have I found such [great] faith in all of Israel" which teaches us that the people who should have the greatest faith are often found lacking. What about you? Do you have great faith?

*Trans:* Place great faith in the authority of Christ.

#### II. Strengthen your faith through the faithfulness of God (7:18-35).

- **Read 18-20.** Are you surprised to find John and/or his disciples doubting the character of Jesus' mission?
- They ask: "Is Jesus the Coming One?" In other words, he is the Messiah, the Savior for whom they have been awaiting?
- Sometimes it is difficult to have faith... I'm sure some came here with doubts. You may doubt God's existence. If he does exist, you may doubt that he is good and powerful when you see all the suffering in the world. Do you doubt that Jesus was raised from the dead? Do you doubt that salvation is really by grace? I want to encourage you to explore your doubts and objections. See if there are explanations that are both intellectually credible and existentially satisfying (both reasonable and fulfilling).
- God is big enough to handle your questions and your doubts, and I believe if you begin to explore, you will find some really sufficient answers.
- Some scholars believe these are the doubts of John the Baptist. Is that possible? Sure. The most blessed saints could possibly struggle with significant doubt, but I don't believe that's what is going on here.
- I believe John sent his disciples to Jesus *not* because of his own doubts but because of the doubts of his disciples.
- What is the remedy? Go see for yourself... **Verses 21-23**
- What do they find? All of the promises of God are fulfilled in Jesus. The Jews, based on passages like Isaiah 35, expected the Messiah to cause the lame to walk, the blind to see, and the deaf to hear.
- God is a Covenant keeping, promise keeping God. He is unbelievably faithful to his people.

Let's take a dive on the deep end of the pool for a sec; you can't touch the bottom right here...

- What would God's promises mean if we could not bank on his faithfulness? Not much...
- But listen to Lamentations 3: "**The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**" (Lamentations 3:22-23)
- So now, because we know God is faithful, his promises are now our delight! Because we have seen God's faithfulness in the past we can have confidence in his future grace.
- If you need your faith strengthened, look back at God's past faithfulness. See his current work...

Now look at **Verses 24-30**. Here is why I don't believe John is the one doubting...

- A reed? A softie? No, John is a man of conviction. He's my messenger. He prepared the way for me. John is a rock. In fact, no one has ever been born greater than John...
- **Verse 28** Least in the kingdom is greater...

Here's the issue: doubt spread far and wide, and Jesus had a word for them all. **Verses 31-32**.

- Jesus compares people to fickle little kids. . . The leaders and people basically were saying, "you don't play by our rules, so we're not going to play with you!" They even exaggerate the actions of both John and Jesus to try to tear them down, and Jesus points this out. **Verses 33-35**

- [He was falsely accused of eating and drinking in sinful excess, being a glutton and drunkard. [Some believe this is an allusion to Deut 21:21 which describes how a rebellious, drunken son should be stoned. In other words, they are calling Jesus a rebellious son. (Chester, 41)]
- We know that, unlike us, at times, Jesus was never a glutton or drunkard. BUT Jesus did come eating and drinking... This was a key component of his missionary strategy. **Robert Karris said: "In Luke's Gospel Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal."** This is how he invited people into his life.
- Here's a newsflash: people will probably join you for a meal before they will join you for church. Part of what we are saying around here is: Invite people into your life, then invite them to church and into a relationship with Jesus, but know that most of the time the one will follow the other.
- Jesus loved *all people*. He invited them into his life. Let the words at the end of v.34 hit you hard. Jesus was "a friend..." A friend. Not just an acquaintance... A friend. Not just a "facebook friend." A real friend.
- The church is not to be some insulated little club of good people in here protected from all of the bad people out there.
- If that's your understanding of the gospel, then you don't really get it. The gospel shows us that we are all bad people and the only difference between those inside and outside of the faith is an acceptance of what Christ has done for us in his death and resurrection and a commitment to follow him.
- Jesus was *a friend* of sinners. What about you?
- Luke takes us to the end of this chapter with a beautiful case study on that reality, and it's here we move to our third encouragement concerning the life of faith.

### III. Display great faith through extravagant devotion (7:36-8:3).

- **Vv. 36-38**...Story... Jesus was a unique party... Three main characters set the stage for this meal. Simon, the host; Jesus, the distinguished guest, and an unnamed sinful woman, the intruder. Look at what happens...
- "a woman of the city, who was a sinner."
- We see all throughout this chapter that Jesus cares for outsiders. Roman centurion, outsider. Widow of Nain, outsider. Sinful woman, off the charts outsider, and these are the people Jesus loved to hang with.
- We want this church to filled with outsiders, people with imperfect pasts and flaws on their records.
- This woman approached Jesus, and got intensely personal by cleaning his feet with her tears, hair and costly ointment. And many in the room were appalled.
- This shocking story is about to take a shocking twist. And the upside-down kingdom of Jesus continues to be unfolded for the reader of Luke's gospel. Look at v. **39**....
- Here's the irony: IF he were a prophet, he would have known, he would have been able to see through to the condition of her heart. Surely he is not a prophet sent from God." BUT... Jesus is about to demonstrate to Simon that he not only sees the condition of this woman's heart, but he also see through the condition of Simon's heart and exposes him beginning in **v.40-50**

This is a parable of reception.... There are two responses to Jesus and two responses to the woman

- To Jesus: 1) The host who played the spectator. 2) The intruder who played the host.
- To the woman: 1) Opposition from the Pharisee. 2) Reception by Jesus.

The short two verse parable and ensuing explanation explains both dynamics.

- Two debtors (one with ten times the debt of the other).
- **Pic:** Let's say \$bags, \_\_\_\_\_, loaned
- The issue is not how much debt you have but how much debt you see that you have.
- The woman saw her great debt. The Pharisee thought he had it all together, and notice that it is only the woman who experiences salvation. **V. 50**

Here's the encouragement for us... this love and forgiveness from Jesus moved her to great love & extravagant devotion.

- The natural product of true faith in Christ is affection for Christ that cannot be hidden. When we sing, does your heart rejoice? When you consider what Christ has done, are you filled with a sense of deep gratitude?
- When the gospel really grips our hearts, Jesus and his will for our lives become supreme.
- In light of what he has done for us, is there anything we would not do for him?
- So the question we have to wrestle with is this: Does my life display extravagant devotion to the Savior?
- Have you been forgiven much? Love much! Your devotion to God will say something about the greatness of your faith...

*Trans: Jesus tells us to place great faith in the authority of Christ, to strengthen our faith through the faithfulness of God, and display our faith through extravagant devotion...*

### Conclusion:

So let me ask the question again: "How great is your faith?" Is Jesus marveling at your faith?

Perhaps Jesus is marveling at you but not in the way we would hope. There is only one other place in Scripture where Jesus marvels at anyone or anything. Mark 6 tells us that when Jesus went to his hometown of Nazareth the people were skeptical and took offense at him. Verse 6 tells us, "He marveled because of their unbelief." Luke wrote this gospel so that people would see the unique authority of Christ, see his deity and trust him with their lives. **(Gospel)**