

The Astonished Savior

Luke 7:1-11

It's not difficult to imagine that hearing the words and seeing the miracles Jesus performed would leave people astonished, stupefied, and bewildered. But today I want to introduce you to a man who left JESUS astonished.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Just off the coast of New York is a little island called "Ellis Island." It was the TSA checkpoint of its day.

This was where immigrants from Europe first came to be processed into American citizenship. Before Ellis Island, each state had its own immigration port. But now, all of Europe would come through that one location.

January 1, 1892, was the opening day. As the first ship docked at Ellis Island, a Viennese doctor approached the deck. It looked as though he would be the FIRST. What an honor and privilege to be the first immigrant to pass through Ellis Island. In fact, he was so frozen by that moment of historical significance that a young IRISH girl named **ANNIE MOORE** slipped around him, and she became the very first immigrant to be processed at Ellis Island.

There is something about being the first to do something. I was the first man in my family to graduate college, the first to earn a Master's degree, and the first to enter into a doctoral program.

Today, we will look at the first Gentile to become a Christian.

Remember last week we looked at Romans 9, and we saw this great sweeping view of redemptive history as:

- ISRAEL, the natural branch, was broken off due to their rejection of Christ as Messiah.
- GENTILES from every tribe and tongue were grafted in...
- UNTIL the last days when ISRAEL's eyes will be open again.

Well, what we saw in **MACRO** last week, the text allows us to see in **MICRO** this week.

We will see how the Kingdom of God begins to take its first citizens from among the Gentiles. Theologically, this passage is a huge deal. You see, for a Jew to come to faith in Christ, he or she must simply follow the truth they have been given their entire lives. Thus, we call Jewish believers **COMPLETED** Jews. But for a Gentile to come into a relationship with the Good God of Israel, they are **CONVERTED** into the faith.

Today, we see the first....remember, already we have seen that the religious establishment had already begun to reject Jesus as Messiah:

Luke 6:11 (ESV)

¹¹ But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Well, that would culminate in the very crucifixion of Jesus Christ. But now you hear rumblings and grumblings. They will increase like birth pangs until our Lord is dead.

Simultaneously, we will see Gentiles slowly being awakened to the reality of the Gospel. Today is the first.

CONTEXT: Remember, Jesus has just completed that greatest of all sermons - the Sermon on the Mount.

TEXT: Luke 7:1–11 (ESV)

¹ After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.

Capernaum, situated on the Sea of Galilee, was the home base of Jesus' ministry. It is where Peter and Andrew lived. It is where they operated their fishing enterprise.

Capernaum was also a Roman Castra or military garrison town. It was protected by ramparts and ditches and interconnected by straight military roads along which their legions could speedily march.

It was situated in the territory of Herod Antipas, but as a client state, it was necessary that Rome maintained a number of soldiers in the area to maintain peace and to squash rebellions.

Among the soldiers in Capernaum was one centurion. Some sources suggest that the word translated as "centurion" was just a general reference to any soldier. But the fact that we read that this particular soldier financed the building of the synagogue suggests he was a soldier of rank and, at the very least, an actual centurion.

An analysis of Roman military pay compared to modern American Army officers reveals that a centurion would have made about 30% more than a captain in the US Army. ¹ Also, upon retirement, they would be gifted an estate in a veteran town like Philippi in Greece or Beth-shean in Judea.

¹ <https://www.mining.com/what-a-roman-centurions-pay-says-about-gold/#:~:text=A centurion was paid a salary equivalent to 38.58 ounces of gold.>

² Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him.

We don't know what the role of this particular servant included, but we do know it was significant. It also seems that this centurion saw the servant's impending death as more than a measured loss; he seems to love this servant as he would a son or a brother.

³ When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.

So this gives us a glimpse into the favor Jesus had among the Elders of the Capernaum synagogue. This is one reason he made his base there rather than Nazareth. This also gives us a portrait of intercessory prayer.

The centurion did not see himself as worthy of appealing to Jesus on behalf of his servant. So he enlisted these Elders to go to Jesus on his behalf. That is what we do when we pray for others. We go to Jesus; we appeal to him on their behalf.

While we all come to Jesus by faith alone, not all prayers carry the same weight.

James 5:16 (KJV 1900)

¹⁶...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

You may not know it now - but a day is coming when you better have some righteous men praying for you. Can you study the Bible and pray on a boat in the middle of the intercoastal? Of course, you can - but if you neglect the church gathering, you do so to your own peril.

This centurion had more than rank, more than financial means. He had godly friends to intercede for him. Notice how they prayed...

⁴ And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue."

Their appeal was granted, for we see...

⁶ And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ⁷ Therefore I did not presume to come to you.

NOTE that while the Elders said this man is worthy of a miracle, he did not see himself as worthy of even being in the presence of Jesus. LISTEN: It's good if

people think highly of you. A good name is more valuable than silver and gold. BUT always remember that you are a sinner in perpetual need of a Savior.

ILLUSTRATION: When the Caesar would enter a city for a victorious triumphal parade, a slave would be stationed behind him on a chariot whispering into his ear, "Memento Mori" ("remember you are mortal"). The Holy Spirit whispers something similar in our ears - Memento Paccator - remember you are a sinner.

The centurion said - I'm not worthy...

7b. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. 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."

So the centurion says, "I understand how authority works."

- Centurions reported to Tribunes.
- Tribunes reported to the Roman Senate.
- The Roman Senate served the Administration of the Caesar.

As such, a command of a centurion carried the weight and the gravitas of Caesar himself, so long as the centurion was operating under proper authority.

The centurion knew enough about the faith that He knew that Jesus was operating under the direct authority of God the Father, and if Jesus said the word, his servant would be healed.

⁹ When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him,

The Greek word translated "marveled" is the word θαυμάζω [thaumazo /**thou-mad-zo/**] It means to be extraordinarily impressed with something or to witness something beyond human comprehension.

Jesus hears the message from the centurion, and his jaw drops. WHY IS THAT? I mean, this man believed Jesus could heal his servant. By this point, Jesus had healed thousands of people. What is so significant about the fact that this centurion believed Jesus could heal one more?

The next part of the verse answers that question...

9b. and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "**I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.**" ¹⁰ And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

EVERYTHING THAT JESUS SHOULD HAVE FOUND IN THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL WAS FOUND IN SPADES IN THE FAITH OF THIS CENTURION.

We don't know the centurion heritage, but we do know he was NOT a Jew.

ILLUSTRATION: You see, according to scripture, all of humanity dwelt together. All that could be known of God had been handed down by oral traditions from the creation of the world, the great flood, etc. God commanded humanity to spread over the face of the earth and conquer and cultivate the planet. Instead, man rebelled and built a great tower, the Tower of Babel. And they stated their reason; they built it so they would NOT be scattered. Well, God came down and scattered their languages.

Some went south into Africa, some went east into Asia, and some went north into Europe, each carrying with them the oral traditions they had at Babel. This is why, no matter where you go on the planet, the ancient religions all tell of a first human couple, they all tell of a great and cataclysmic flood, and they all have a Noah figure.

But of all those people, over time, they began to worship and serve CREATION rather than the CREATOR who is blessed forever...except for one. God came down and entered into a Covenant with Abraham. It wasn't that Abraham was so wonderful. In fact, far from it. But God always has His remnant, and Abraham was the remnant of faith.

It was through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants, that the proper knowledge of the Creator would be maintained. They were to inherit the promised land and establish a great city set upon a hill - and they were to make the world know the truth of God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

These descendants of Abraham had the LAW and the PROPHETS. They carried the promise of a MESSIAH who was to come. They wore on their bodies the sign of the covenant - circumcision.

But this Roman Centurion? He had no sign of the Covenant. He was not of Abraham, Isaac or Jacob. He claimed to be from the tribe of Benjamin, and he had no land of promise to inherit.

Who were his people? We don't know. But likely, they were Romans, Spaniards...maybe he sailed across from Britannia. It doesn't matter. He was no Jew.

These centurions were expected to pay homage to Caesar as Lord. They were likely part of one of the cult temples to Jupiter or Mars.

Israel had gained some semblance of independence from Greece through the Maccabean revolt. That lasted nearly 100 years, but then, in 63 BC, Roman General, Pompey invaded Jerusalem. From that point -

- Rome decided who would be the high priest in Israel.

- Rome decided who would be the King of Israel.
- Rome decided how much tax the people of Israel ought to pay to Caesar.

From those taxes, a military machine was built to maintain the Pax Romana Roman Peace. This centurion was one of the men hired by Caesar to keep the Jews in line.

BUT, this centurion was different. There are a few things we can tell about him from these few verses:

1. **He believed in the good God of Israel.** We see here that he was highly respected by the Elders of the synagogue. In fact, he had donated the money to build the synagogue. That is no small gift. We visited the ruins of this particular synagogue when we were in Israel. It was quite large.

Something had happened to this man that caused him to turn his back on the gods of Rome and embrace the covenant keeping God of Israel.

- **Like the Moabite Ruth** - who told Naomi in **Ruth 1:16 (ESV)**
¹⁶ But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.
- **Like the Syrian Naaman** - When he believed and was baptized, he renounced his gods. And when he returned to Syria, he took a wagon of soil from Israel's home with him and said I will never again sacrifice to my gods... but only to Yahweh of Israel.
- **Like the Ephesians** - Who burned 50,000 pieces of silver's worth of magic books, to come to Jesus.

You see - when you say YES to Jesus, you are saying NO to a lot of other things.

ILLUSTRATION: As many of you know, I returned from a mission trip to Cuba just a few weeks ago. During our time there, we saw over 5,000 come to faith in Christ. Many of the new believers were coming to Jesus from the Santeria religion. I noticed after church, the Cubans were loading up in a truck. I asked where they were going, and they said to help their new brother burn his Santeria altar and idols.

HONEST QUESTION - did you burn any idols when you came to Jesus? What have you said “no” to, because you said “yes” to Jesus?

ILLUSTRATION: We live in a day where people are more than willing to tack Jesus onto their long list of idols. It is supposed that a Christian commitment is no more than the proper wording in your social media profile. But friend, God does not allow for that...He demands to be GOD over every aspect of your life.

This centurion believed in the “good” God of Israel.

2. He was a man of great humility.

Notice that the elders told Jesus - this man **DESERVES** you to heal his servant.. he is a good man...the centurion didn't look at himself that way at all. In fact, he never even met Jesus face to face. He sent messengers saying, “I am unworthy to have you come under my roof.”

There is something about grace... when you recognize that you are fully and completely deserving of God's wrath... **BUT GOD...** in his great mercy, reached down and touched your dead, depraved soul, bound in chains of sin, and said, “LIVE.”

Like the prodigal who came to his senses, you arose and returned to your Father's house, hoping to be no more than a hired hand, but finding that he embraces you as a **SON**, puts a ring on your finger, and celebrates your return.

There is no place for boasting. There is no place for self-exaltation. There is no place for pride or arrogance. We are here by pure grace.

3. He was a man who had been changed.

- **His work life changed** - He was kind and loving toward his servant. In a culture where most Romans viewed their servants as personal property, this centurion cared deeply for his servants like a member of his family.
- **His relationships changed** - He was friends with the Elders of the synagogue. In a day when Jews and Gentiles didn't fellowship, this man had broken through racial, ethnic, and cultural barriers. Not only did he see them as citizens of God's Kingdom, he saw them as friends.
- **His finances changed** - Perhaps the greatest evidence that this man had been truly and genuinely converted was the fact that he invested his hard-earned resources into the expansion of God's Kingdom. He financed the synagogue. Illustration: Remember the rich young ruler; he loved everything about following Jesus until he realized it was going to cost him what he loved most... his wealth.

Jesus has never saved anyone that he did not change. No change equals no Jesus.

NOW - When Jesus descended from heaven, what did he expect to see? He should have seen faith in Israel, humility in Israel, and true and lasting change in Israel. BUT HE DID NOT - so here in this text, we see the first grafting of this GENTILE CENTURION into the KINGDOM.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: What do you suppose He will find here today? Will he find faith? Will he find humility? Will he find a life change?