

“The Man Who Amazed Jesus”

(Luke 7:1-10)

Introduction

➤ There was no one like Jesus Christ – not even close – nor will there ever be anyone like Him. He was absolutely, unquestionably, the greatest human to ever live. Even though He was born in obscurity and poverty, He is the central figure of all human history. Our very calendar marks Jesus’ birth as the dividing point of world history. At His birth, and throughout His life, Jesus amazed people – crowds both large and small, the religious elite and the social “nobody’s”, those who believed in Him and those who despised Him.

✓ Illust: “There is no doubt that Jesus Christ is the most amazing person who ever lived. The gospels repeatedly record that people were astounded, astonished, even traumatized by the words He spoke and the miracles He performed. His divine knowledge and supernatural power exceed all comprehension” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Luke*; 7:1-10).

➤ This fact becomes abundantly clear as we peruse through the Gospels for the many times in which we are told that the people were amazed by what Jesus did or said.

Luke 2:17-18 ~ “And when they [i.e., the shepherds] saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered [*thaumazō*] at what the shepherds told them.”

Luke 2:33 ~ “And his father and his mother marveled [*thaumazō*] at what was said about him.”

Luke 2:46-48 [as a child in the temple] ~ “After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷And all who heard him were amazed [*existēmi*] at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸And when his parents saw him, they were astonished [*ekplēssomai*]. ...”

Luke 4:22 [at the synagogue in Nazareth] ~ “And all spoke well of him and marveled [*thaumazō*] at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’”

Luke 4:31-32 ~ “And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, ³²and they were astonished [*ekplēssomai*] at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.”

Matt 7:28-29 ~ “And when Jesus finished these sayings [“The Sermon on the Mount”], the crowds were astonished [*ekplēssomai*] at his teaching, ²⁹for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”

Luke 8:24-25 ~ “And they went and woke him, saying, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’ And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵He said to them, ‘Where is your faith?’ And they were afraid [*phobeomai*], and they marveled [*thaumazō*], saying to one another, ‘Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?’”

Matt 8:27 ~ “And the men marveled [*thaumazō*], saying, ‘What sort of man [*potapos*] is this, that even winds and sea obey him?’”

Luke 8:55-56 [Jairus’ dead daughter] ~ “And her spirit returned, and she got up at once. And he directed that something should be given her to eat. ⁵⁶And her parents were amazed [*existēmi*], but he charged them to tell no one what had happened.”

Luke 9:42-44 [demon-possessed boy] ~ “While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³And all were astonished [*ekplēssomai*] at the majesty of God. But while they were all marveling [*thaumazō*] at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples, ⁴⁴‘Let these words sink into your ears: The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.’”

Luke 11:14 ~ “Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled [*thaumazō*].”

Matt 9:32-33 ~ “As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. ³³And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke. And the crowds marveled [*thaumazō*], saying, ‘Never was anything like this seen in Israel.’”

Luke 20:19, 26 ~ “The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour ... ²⁶And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling [*thaumazō*] at his answer they became silent.”

Luke 24:12 ~ “But Peter rose and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; and he went home marveling [*thaumazō*] at what had happened.”

Luke 24:22-24 ~ “Moreover, some women of our company amazed [*existēmi*] us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, ²³and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.”

Luke 24:40-41 ~ “And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling [*thaumazō*], he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’”

The gospels are replete with instances where Jesus amazed people. People were often surprised, and even shocked, by Jesus. They were astounded by His words and confounded by His miracles. For He not only spoke with divine authority, but Jesus also demonstrated His divine authority over disease, disability, death, and demons. He defied the self-righteous religious leaders, He transcended the laws of nature, and He revealed Himself as the divine Son of God in the flesh.

➤ While Jesus often amazed people, only twice does Scripture reveal that Jesus was amazed. One occurred on Jesus’ final visit to Nazareth:

Mark 6:1-6 ~ “He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished [*ekplēssomai*], saying, ‘Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offense [*skandalizō*] at him. ⁴And Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.’ ⁵And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶And he marveled [*thaumazō*] because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching.”

The only other occurrence, and the only positive occurrence of Jesus being amazed, is in the passage before us this morning:

Luke 7:1-10 ~ “After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ²Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. ³When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, ‘He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.’ ⁶And 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. ⁷Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸For 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.’ ⁹When 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.’ ¹⁰And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.”

- I have outlined this passage with four major headings in order to highlight the various themes in these verses.

1. The Setting (vs.1)

- At the outset, it is important for us to note the setting. In verse one we have a major transition: *“After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum”* (vs.1). The reference to *“all his sayings”* draws our attention back to chapter six (verses 20-49), where Jesus preached what is known as His “Sermon on the Plain” (or “Sermon on the Plateau”). This was similar to Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” (Matt.5-7), but at a different location and possibly to a different crowd.

Luke’s account of Jesus’ sermon was not a word-for-word transcript but a summary of what Jesus preached. We know that the people sometimes followed Jesus for hours at a time – listening to Him teach/preach and witnessing/experiencing His miracles (see Lk.9:11-12).

- After preaching this sermon (in the mountain regions of Galilee), Jesus *“entered Capernaum”* (vs.1). While Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Judea; as fulfillment of Old Testament Messianic prophecies; see Mic.5:2; Matt.2:1-7), and His parents were from Nazareth (Galilee; Lk.2:39), Jesus setup His Galilean headquarters in Capernaum (after those in Nazareth tried to kill Him by attempting to throw Him off a cliff; Lk.4:16-31).

Capernaum was the hometown of Peter and Andrew, James and John, and Matthew (Matt.4:18, 21; 9:9). It was a small but important and prosperous fishing town, located on the trade route and on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee (about 25 miles north of Nazareth). Capernaum became known as Jesus’ *“home”* (Mk.2:1; Matt.9:1).

- Tragically, even though Jesus spent so much time in Capernaum (and because Jesus spent so much time in Capernaum) – teaching and preaching and performing miracles – Jesus would pronounce a condemnation over them for their unbelief and unrepentant sin.

Luke 10:13-15 ~ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴But it will be more bearable in the judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ¹⁵And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades.”

- Those in Capernaum had a “front-row seat” to Jesus’ public ministry, and they had Him living in their midst. Yet, apparently, most of them refused to believe in Him. This is a great example, and sobering warning, to us all that a person can be around Christian things – attending church, hearing sermons, reading the Bible, even professing to be Christian – and not be saved.

✓ Illust: “The saddest road to hell is that which runs under the pulpit, past the Bible and through the midst of warnings and invitations” (J.C. Ryle, “Are You Asleep?”).

2. The Servant (vs.2)

- In verse two, we are introduced to an anonymous *“servant”* (*doulos*; which means “slave”). For obvious reasons, translators are wary of using the word slave in English translations (often translating the word “servant” or “bondservant”). But word literally refers to a person who is owned by another.

✓ Illust: “The ancient world had an economy driven by slavery (people became slaves either as prisoners of war or because of economic debt)” (William D. Mounce; *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words*; “Servant”).

- In verse two we note two important details about this servant. First, we read that he *“was sick and at the point of death”* (vs.2). While we are not told cause of the servant’s illness, it is clear that the servant was terminally ill and *“about to die”* (vs.2; HCSB). His life was hanging on by a thread. With no cure in sight, he seemingly had only hours, or minutes, to live.

The second important detail regarding this servant is that he *“was highly valued by”* his centurion master (vs.2). While this information tells us a bit about the centurion, it also tells us a lot about this servant. The Greek word translated *“highly valued”* (vs.7; *entimos*) can be interpreted in two different ways. The servant may have been a valued asset or worker (“employee”), or he may have been valued for his character and relationship to the centurion. I think the two are not mutually exclusive. The context seems to suggest the centurion – who is described as loving (vs.5), generous (vs.5), humble (vs.6-7), and a man of great faith (vs.7-10) – had a strong and personal affection for this servant, which likely stemmed from the servant’s honorable and faithful work (e.g., Dan.6:3).

Col 3:22-24 ~ “Bondservants [*doulos*], obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

Eph 6:5-8 ~ “Bondservants [*doulos*], obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants [*doulos*] of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant [*doulos*] or is free.”

- The centurion did not merely value the work of his servant but deeply cared for the servant. The Greek word translated *“servant”* (vs.7; *pais*) may indicate that he was a child or young boy.

3. The Centurion (vs.3-8)

- The third major heading is the centurion, who takes up the bulk of this passage (briefly introduced in verse two). He is an incredibly interesting person. First, we see that he is a *“centurion”* (*hekatontarchēs*) which literally describes one who is a commander over one hundred soldiers. So, we can safely conclude that this man was a man of substantial status and authority (as he attested; vs.8). While he was most likely a Gentile (vs.9), it is possible that he was a convert (proselyte) to Judaism (vs.5).

In verse three, we read that *“When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant”* (vs.3). Clearly, the centurion knew of Jesus and believed – or at least hoped – that Jesus would (could) heal this servant. The fact that he sent *“elders of the Jews”* (vs.3; perhaps synagogue or civil leaders) indicates the centurion’s standing in the Jewish community, and possibly his feelings of being unworthy to approach Jesus with his request.

These *“elders”* (*presbyteros*) were seemingly more than willing to plead to Jesus on the centurion’s behalf *“to come and heal his servant”* (vs.3). They went to Jesus and *“pleaded with him earnestly, saying, ‘He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue’”* (vs.4-5). They *“earnestly”* (*spoudaiōs*) gave the centurion a glowing – albeit misguided – reference. Perhaps stemming from their self-righteous (legalistic) religious paradigm, they lobbied for Jesus to perform for the centurion [*“you have to do this for him”* (vs.4)] based on his personal goodness [*“He is worthy”* (vs.4; *axios*, i.e., deserving); *“he loves our nation”* (vs.5)] and his good works [*“he is the one who built us our synagogue”* (vs.5)].

In essence, they were saying to Jesus: “You have to help this man! He deserves it, he has earned the right for you to do what he wants.” Thankfully, the centurion did not share their sanctimonious sentiment of himself.

- Jesus graciously *“went with them”* (vs.6) to the centurion’s home (see vs.6). But before Jesus would reach 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. ⁷Therefore I did not presume to come to you’”* (vs.6-7). Contrary to the message of the elders, the centurion readily acknowledged his unworthiness [notice the change in personal pronouns – from *“he/him”* (vs.4-5) to *“I/my”* (vs.6-8)].

The elders told Jesus what they thought of the centurion, and the friends told Jesus what the centurion thought of himself. He was humble and understood that he did not deserve anything good from God. This is the very basis and impetus of grace – getting what we do not deserve.

His friends were much better messengers than the Jewish elders. Whereas the elders touted the man's worth and worthiness, the friends relayed the centurion's own feelings of worthlessness and unworthiness. He knew that he had no inherent goodness in him, or any amount of good works, that would obligate Jesus answer his request let alone come to his house – or *“trouble”* (vs.6; *skyllō* - to harass or bother) Jesus in any way!

Luke 8:49 ~ “While he was still speaking, someone from the ruler's house came and said, ‘Your daughter is dead; do not trouble [*skyllō*] the Teacher any more.’”

- It is easy for us to be deceived into thinking that Jesus (God) owes us. For our sin nature (aided by our American culture, and much of Americanized Christianity) relentlessly demands that God should perform to our liking. Our sinful pride declares, “God, if You want me to worship You, if you want me to love You, You must do what I want. And, if You fail to do what I want, then I will be mad at You, or I will stop worshiping You, or I will stop believing in You!”

If we are not careful, if we do not fight to be humble, if we do not truly understand our need for God to be gracious and merciful, we will begin to think of ourselves as “the potter” and God as “the clay” (see Jer.18:1-11; Rom.9:20-21).

- The centurion understood that God owed him nothing. Contrary to what the Jewish elders attested, he understood that he was not deserving of God's grace or mercy, or worthy of God's love. The centurion readily professed that he was unworthy to have Jesus grant him his request (*“let my servant be healed”*; vs.7); that he was unworthy to have Jesus come to his house (*“I am not worthy to have you come under my roof”*; vs.6); and that he was even unworthy to be in Jesus' presence (*“I did not presume to come to you”*; vs.7).

Luke 5:4-8 ~ “And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’ ⁵And Simon answered, ‘Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.’ ⁶And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ⁷They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’”

Luke 18:9-14 ~ “He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

- The centurion not only displayed great humility, but also great faith. He said, *“But say the word, and let my servant be healed”* (vs.7). For various reasons, Jesus healed people in many different ways –
- He touched a person (Lk.5:13; 22:51),
 - a person touched Him (Lk.8:44),
 - He spit on the ground (Jn.9:6),
 - He spit on a person (Matt.8:23),
 - He put His fingers in a person's ears (Mk.7:33),
 - He touched a coffin (Lk.7:14),
 - He shouted with a loud voice (Jn.11:43)

While Jesus was sometimes near the person, other times He healed from far away (Matt.8:13; 15:28; Jn.4:52-53). The point is Jesus did not have to do anything to heal other than will the healing into existence (by His divine authority). The depth of the centurion's faith in Christ revealed that he understood this. *"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"* (vs.8). He believed that Jesus possessed divine authority, particularly the authority to heal and perhaps he believed Jesus possessed authority over life and death.

➤ Contrast the centurion's faith and understanding with that of Martha and Mary.

John 11:21 ~ "Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'"

John 11:32 ~ "Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'"

➤ This is why the centurion amazed Jesus. The centurion believed that Jesus had divine authority to will the servant's healing. He believed that all Jesus had to do so was *"say the word"* (vs.7) and the servant would be immediately and completely healed.

Gen 1:3 ~ "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

Luke 5:12-13 ~ "While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.' ¹³And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean.' And immediately the leprosy left him."

John 11:43-44 ~ "When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.'"

⁴⁴The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"

4. The Savior (vs.9-10)

➤ Keep in mind, Jesus still has not seen the centurion. And, humanly speaking, He may have never seen him. Having first heard the message from the elders, and then from the friends, Jesus *"marveled"* (vs.9; *thaumazō*; "to be amazed, wonder, marvel") at the centurion. Again, this is the only time in Scripture where Jesus is said to be amazed by someone's faith (the other time Jesus was amazed was by the lack of faith of the people of Nazareth; Mk.6:6).

➤ Then, *"turning to the crowd that followed him"* Jesus said, *"I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith"* (vs.9). This is both a positive and negative statement. The positive is that Jesus affirmed the centurion's great faith, and the negative is that such faith was nowhere to be found in Israel. The Gentile's faith surpassed the faith of the Jews (many of whom rejected Jesus as the Messiah of God; Jn.1:11).

The centurion's faith was not merely in Jesus' ability to heal, but in Jesus' divine *"authority"* (vs.8). He did not just see Jesus as a miracle worker, but as God who holds the power over life and death. This faith resulted in deep humility (*"not worthy"*; vs.6), for the one who truly believes in Jesus as the Son of God will worship Him (and live for Him) in great humility. This is the faith that Jesus commends.

➤ The way Luke simply concluded this narrative perfectly highlights the faith of the centurion, and (more importantly) the divine power and authority of Jesus Christ: *"And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well"* (vs.10; see possible parallel account in Matt.8:5-13). No fanfare. No theatrics. Not even a pronouncement of healing. Jesus was not even in the house, nor had he even seen the centurion or the servant. The servant was immediately healed by the divine will of the Son of God (Matt.8:13).

Conclusion

- The application of this biblical narrative is almost too obvious to mention. Do we have the same faith in Jesus as did the centurion? Not a faith that Jesus will do whatever we want, but a faith in Jesus as the one and only Son of God and one and only Savior from God.

Luke 23:47 ~ “Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent!’”

Matt 27:54 ~ “When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’”

Mark 15:39 ~ “And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’”

- Do you truly believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Does your faith resemble that of the centurion, or is your faith fickle, fragile, or fake? Is your faith in Christ, or is your faith in the power of faith? Do you truly believe that Jesus is the Christ, or is your “belief” self-serving or hypocritical? Does your faith bring you humbly before God, or is your “faith” an attempt to manipulate God to get what you want?
- ✓ Illust: “What do we each know of this faith? This is the great question. Our learning may be small – but do we believe? Our opportunities of giving and working for Christ's cause may be few – but do we believe? We may neither be able to preach, nor write, nor argue for the Gospel – but do we believe? May we never rest until we can answer this inquiry! Faith in Christ appears a small and simple thing to the children of this world. They see in it nothing great or grand. But faith in Christ is most precious in God's sight, and like most precious things, is rare. By it true Christians live. By it they stand. By it they overcome the world. Without this faith no one can be saved” (JC Ryle; *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Matthew*; 8:1-15).
- Your faith in Christ will never be perfect in this life, but it must be real! Truth Christian faith is to believe that Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God, and the one and only Savior from God.