

Luke 7A

- At the conclusion of Luke 6, Jesus had just finished His sermon – the sermon commonly call the Sermon on the Mount
 - Though the Sermon was addressed to the crowd overall, it was specially intended for the disciples
 - They've been receiving their crash course in righteousness training in preparation for the work to come in establishing the early church
 - During the course of this training, Jesus has taught on forgiveness, judgment, and the need to discern true followers and true teachers from the false ones
- Each of his lessons turned on its head some custom or teaching common to the day and common to the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day
 - So Jesus was not only preparing the disciples with the truth – He was also countering the misteaching of those false leaders
- Yet if Jesus had been satisfied with merely explaining the truth concerning righteousness, it's possible the disciples may never have been able to carry out their commission to spread the gospel
 - Because in addition to correcting their view on righteousness, Jesus still had to correct another major misconception held by all the disciples
 - But this new area of confusion was so strongly held – so deeply entrenched in Jewish culture, it could only be addressed through example
 - Mere teaching alone could never hope to correct it
 - And unless this error was addressed, Jesus knew the disciples could never fully comply with the Great Commission to bring the Good news to all the earth
 - In fact some of the disciples are so reluctant to let go of their past teaching on this issue and embrace what Jesus demonstrates that some of them, including Peter himself, will continue to struggle with it even after Jesus is crucified

- So what was this new teaching that Jesus was to demonstrate to the disciples?
 - It was that God was about to set aside for a time the special distinction of being Jew and in its place would emerge a gathering believers, both Jew and Gentile
 - Even more radically, with this change comes the end of the Law for all who believe

Luke 7:1 ¶ When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum.

Luke 7:2 ¶ And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die.

Luke 7:3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave.

Luke 7:4 When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him;

Luke 7:5 for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue."

- Jesus ends His discourse, and returns to Capernaum
 - It's interesting to me that Jesus moves back and forth through a relatively small area of the Galilee during these early periods of His ministry
 - And it's worth remembering that earlier Luke recorded how Jesus was able to perform many miracles in Capernaum due to the faith and response of the people there
 - In contrast He wasn't able to perform many miracles in Nazareth for exactly the opposite reason
 - And this is at least the third time in Luke's gospel we've heard of Jesus entering Capernaum
- At first it seems that Jesus has no plan at all
 - He just wanders aimlessly from spot to spot – teach a little, move on , turn around, go back, etc.
 - If He were running His ministry this way today, He'd probably be given all kinds of advice on how to run His ministry more effectively

- You need a 5-year plan
- You need goals and ways to measure your goals, etc.
- Of course, there are advantages to being well organized and deliberate in your approach to ministry, but when does planning begin to replace reliance on the Holy Spirit for day-to-day direction?
- What if He directed you to go somewhere other than where your 5-year plan was trying to take you?
- In Jesus ministry, we see a perfect embodiment of following the Spirit
 - And consider what it looks like from the standpoint of worldly values
 - He wandered, he had no vision, no plan
 - Sometimes follow God's direction won't look like the world expects it to look

[John 3:8](#) "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

- By the way, even though everything Jesus did during His earthly ministry was according to the Father's will and purposes, we shouldn't discount the sheer practicality of it either
 - Jesus went where His ministry was most effective – where He was received and His message bore fruit
 - He went to Capernaum because He could discern by the fruit it bore that this was the town where the Holy Spirit was at work
 - He didn't go back to Nazareth because of opposite condition – no fruit
 - And we should do the same thing
- Effective ministry depends entirely on the Father to work through His Holy Spirit in the hearts of men
 - So if we depend on the Holy Spirit to actually accomplish anything in ministry, it only makes sense to go where we see Him at work
 - And this is what Jesus is doing

- But neither can we get our mind so focused on our plans that we forget to follow the Spirit when he turns to a new direction
 - Like following the wind
 - We have to constantly be seeking the wind, looking for evidence of where it's going
- So Jesus goes into Capernaum again
- As He enters the town, a group of Jewish elders approached Jesus and asked Him to come heal a Roman centurion's slave
 - This is a bold request by the centurion
 - He really had little reason to expect this rabbi's help
 - A centurion was a noncommissioned officer in the Roman army and usually commanded about 100 men
 - Men would enlist in the army and remain for 25 years in order to receive Roman citizenship
 - And they were often hard men who had a hard life and low wages
 - But within their area of control they could wield significant power and authority
 - And it wasn't uncommon for a man in this position to use his authority to extort the local population – taking bribes, kick backs and other means if augmenting their income
- So for a Jewish rabbi, an occupying Roman soldier - a Gentile, a man who oppressed them and took their money - was hardly someone deserving of his mercy
 - Jesus was no ordinary Jewish rabbi and this man was no ordinary soldier
 - He was well respected and as the elders testify, he helped the Jews in his region
 - Helping Jews was smart politically, but in this case it was also clearly a sign of faith in the Jewish God
 - In fact, he is said to love the Jewish nation

- We're told that this centurion has a slave that he cares greatly for
 - In fact, in verse 7 he uses a word for servant that can also be translated as son – it's an enduring term
 - Apparently, the elders must have taken pity on the centurion and perhaps they tell him about this amazing rabbi who's traveling around the region performing miraculous healings
 - Naturally, the centurion asks the elders if they could convince Jesus to come heal the slave
 - The fact that he uses the elders to seek after Jesus is part due to humility (as he mentions later) but it's a humility that comes from the distinction of Jew verses Gentile
 - The centurion would have imagined that no self respecting rabbi would come to the home of a Gentile, much less a Roman soldier
 - His only hope – and it was a small one – was that the rabbi could be persuaded by the appeal of Jewish elders
- As you study this account, remember that the disciples would have been thinking exactly the same thing
 - It's probably hard for us to fully appreciate the perspective of a 1st century Jew regarding gentiles
 - A Jew believed that by God's promise to Abraham, He had set apart the Jewish people forever – the descendents of Isaac – and that no other people could ever receive God's blessings
 - That all non Jews – gentiles – were condemned simply by virtue of not having been born Jew
 - This is an incomplete understanding of scripture, and though we don't have time this morning to explore all the reasons why that view is wrong according to scripture, we should at least understand some of the problems this view created for the Jews
 - First, it led them to see all other men as scum – unworthy of their compassion or even their fellowship
 - Consider how the elders try to convince Jesus to come to this man's aid:

- They felt compelled to list reasons why he has earned their favor
- Secondly, it gave the Jew a sense of entitlement with regard to eternal matters
 - A Jew was saved simply because they were born Jew
 - We saw a hint of this earlier in this gospel when we taught on John the Baptist
 - The Pharisees at the river

[Luke 3:8](#) "Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

- In Matt's gospel account of the centurion, He records these words of Jesus following the centurion's show of faith

[Matt. 8:11](#) "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;
[Matt. 8:12](#) but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

- Finally, there was an additional complicating factor mixed into this incorrect Jewish perspective
 - The Jew also understood the law was given to the Jewish nation – and no one else – because it was the secret recipe for getting to heaven
 - So Jews would work tirelessly trying to keep the law in order to make themselves righteous – and they lived a life of works as a result
- Remember, it's not just the Jewish leaders who think like this – most Jews more or less thought like this – including the disciples
 - It's how they've been trained – it's all around them in the culture
- Through this centurion's request, Jesus gets the opportunity to demonstrate a compassionate response to gentiles

- And it's a perfect opportunity – because you couldn't do much worse in a Jew's eyes than a Roman soldier
- So Jesus starts off for the house, but before He gets there, the centurion himself comes out to intercept Jesus

Luke 7:6 Now Jesus *started* on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof;

Luke 7:7 for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but *just* say the word, and my servant will be healed.

Luke 7:8 "For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."

Luke 7:9 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith."

Luke 7:10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

- He says that He is not worthy for Jesus to come to his home – Jesus could heal the slave from where He stood – without ever having to be with the slave
 - Before Jesus can respond, the centurion feels compelled to explain his thinking
 - He says that he knows that Jesus can heal the slave simply by His word
 - He goes on to explain that he himself was a man under authority
 - Moreover, he also had men under his authority – so he understood better than most how real authority works
 - Real authority can accomplish something merely by a word – a command
 - And everything that is under that authority will respond to that word
- If you have been in authority, you understand this idea clearly
 - Parents, when kids are little, how do you measure whether they respect your authority? By whether they obey your word (the first time)

- And how do you know when your authority over your children is waning – when a child no longer heeds your words
- Or as a former military officer, I can tell you that in times of conflict, a leader's authority must be unquestioned, his word must be obeyed without hesitation or lives can be lost
- Remember even in the beginning, all creation came to be merely on the power of God's word – and Jesus is the embodiment of the Word for us
- So real authority – and respect for that authority - is not demonstrated by might – rather it is most clearly seen when a mere word results in the desired outcome
- So what does it mean that this centurion told Jesus to simply give His word and he knew the slave would be healed?
 - Simply, it means that he believed in the power of Jesus' word – the word of God
 - Notice that he begins in humility admitting his own unworthy – perhaps a sign that he was experiencing the repentance brought by the Holy Spirit
 - Then he said he demonstrated what kind of authority Jesus had – that he had authority over the body of a man –
 - Something only the body's Creator could claim to have
 - In a word, this man had faith – faith that Jesus had authority over the creation and could exercise that authority with only his word
- Do you know the Biblical definition of faith?
 - We started by looking at the description of faith given in Hebrews 11:1

[Heb. 11:1](#) ¶ Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

- Faith is a trust in something completely without tangible proof

- Then we considered what Paul gives us in Rom 8:24

[Rom. 8:24](#) For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is **seen** is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees?

- Paul reminds us that if what we have faith in can be seen, it's not faith at all – it's merely self-evident

- True faith begins before proof arrives – because it is a future looking expectation
 - Ultimately, we come to the conclusion that faith is believing in God’s promises – taking Him at His word
 - And then living your life in such a way that it demonstrates outwardly your trust in God’s promises – in His word
- So, what would you say about this centurion’s view of Jesus?
 - Well, Jesus said it Himself – no one in Israel had yet shown even this much faith
 - Jesus isn’t just complimenting this man’s understanding of Jesus’ power
 - He’s remarking on his willingness to live according to his faith
- And there’s the true lesson who us in this account
 - Let’s face it...when it comes to our faith, words are cheap
 - People can say they believe in a lot of things – usually things they can see or control (I believe in myself)
 - That’s not true belief
 - We can say we believe in the gospel and in Christ’s words concerning how we live or how we treat one another
 - But how do we actually live?
 - That’s the test of whether our faith is real
- There’s a term that’s been coined recently by people who study trends in society and religion
 - The term is nominal Christian
 - The word nominal comes form the Latin root nomen which means name
 - It means “in name only” – Christians who are Christian in name only
 - The term was coined because in recent decades the researchers have concluded that there are far more people willing to call themselves

Christians when responding to surveys than are truly Christians in the Biblical sense of the word

- So, today we have Christians and nominal Christians
 - How do you know the difference? Well, we can't know perfectly this side of heaven – only God knows
 - But one way we can get a good idea is to consider how they live their lives
 - I'm sure we can all imagine what it might look like to be a nominal Christian
 - They call themselves Christians, but they don't particularly care to attend the gathering of believers on a regular basis
 - They don't serve the Body with their gifts or offerings
 - They don't pray, they don't study the Bible
 - They make no effort whatsoever to conform their lives to Jesus' teachings or the expectations of scripture
 - And while some people who do these things are true believers who are living in complete rebellion, I would say that most probably never were believers at all
 - Now we are not made believers by our behavior and we're not in danger of ceasing to be believers because of our behavior
 - But consider this: those nominal Christians really think they're Christians – they're just as sure about themselves as you are about yourself
 - So just to be sure we're not one of those nominal Christians and don't know it, maybe we ought to be willing to subject ourselves to the same test that Jesus is applying here: are you living a life that reflect the faith you claim?
 - Do you trust in Jesus word or do you demand proof at every turn?
 - Can he give you His word through the scripture, and that be enough for you to respond

- Are you bothered when your life doesn't fall into line with God's word? Or do you make excuses for why your way is better
- To be sure it's a hard test, because if we're truthful, we all fail it somewhere – fortunately, there's a big difference between being a perfect Christian and a nominal Christian
- But what of the disciples at this point?
 - Jesus has probably rocked their world a bit
 - Not only has He consented to visit a Gentile and then proceeded to heal his slave
 - He also credited this gentile as having the more faith than all Israel
 - We can't begin to imagine the dumbfounded look that must have been on the disciples faces at that moment
 - The gospel was to be preached to all the nations of the world – not just to Jews
 - And the reason it was to be preached far and wide is because God intended to send His Holy Spirit far and wide as well – to prompt men into a response of faith
 - And here was an early proof for the disciples of God's purposes to bring gentiles to faith
- This will remain a difficult concept for the disciples to grasp even in the years of the early church
 - It's so difficult in fact, that in Acts chapter 10, there is an account of the apostle Peter receiving a dream from God
 - In the dream, Peter is commanded to kill and eat a host of unclean animals – animals forbidden to be eaten under the law
 - Peter protests and declares that he has never broken the law in this way
 - But God tells him that what God has made clean he should not regard as unclean – so Peter takes this sign as license to finally minister to gentiles
- Later in Acts 11, Peter testifies before the other leaders in Jerusalem that gentiles were receiving the gospel gladly

- But some church leaders still can't accept God would save Gentiles
- So Peter recounts his dream and says that if God intends to bring faith to Gentiles, who was he to stand in the way
- And the crowd reacts this way:

[Acts 11:18](#) When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads to life.*"

- You see, Peter was there to hear Jesus' teaching in Luke 6 and he was here to witness Jesus healing the centurion's slave and when Jesus did all His other miracles among the gentiles
 - But nevertheless, God still had to convince Peter of the fact that gentiles could be included in the plan of salvation
 - Next week, Jesus tackles what was probably even more difficult for the disciples – the fading nature of the Jewish law
- Today we have the opportunity to demonstrate our trust in Christ's words by showing obedience to one of His command - to share in communion
 - Jesus commanded his disciples to keep only two practices: baptism and communion
 - Both depict our new life in Christ
 - Baptism demonstrates our raising from the dead to a new live in Christ
 - And communion is our opportunity to remember that our new life comes from and is sustained in Christ – the One Who is the bread of life and who's blood guarantees that promise of eternal life
 - So we celebrate communion here our of obedience to our Lord
- If you are a believer in Jesus – if you trust in Him for your eternal salvation – then join us in this celebration by testifying to that belief through the taking of communion
 - For those with young children, I leave it with you to decide whether taking communion is appropriate for them
 - And if you aren't a believer, well it's not too late

- If you know in your heart that the things you've heard here are true
 - That Jesus was God born as man
 - That He was sent by the Father to receive the Father's wrath for men's sins so that men might have the hope of glory in heaven
 - That when He died on the cross, your sins were judged and the penalty paid
 - Now all that's left is for you to accept this substitution
 - If you do, then God credits Jesus' payment to your account
 - But if you don't, God leave it to you to pay for your own sin – the payment He requires is eternal death – eternal separation from glory – Hell we call it
- So if you know these things are true, then confess it
 - As we close in prayer, join me and confess your faith to God and then demonstrate it to us in taking communion

Daniel prepares to play for us while we conduct communion

The elders will distribute the elements