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## Luke 7:1-10

### The Certain Gospel: Faith on the Outside

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Did you ever play sports as a kid? What's the worst part of **starting** a game? **Picking sides!** Someone appoints **team captains** and they line everyone up. Then each team captain picks one kid and then another and another. And who do they always end up picking first? They pick the **tallest** kid or the **fastest** kid, definitely the most **athletic** kid. And when they pick them, it's like, "High five! Yeah! We got you!"

But then, all the best kids are taken, and the team captains have to choose the **average** players. That's when they start to **concentrate**, their foreheads **scowl** as they focus, and their teammates whisper to them who they should choose because they're trying to figure out which kid is just a little bit better than the others kids. This group is the moderately fast kids, maybe those kids who aren't great at sports, but they're not bad either.

Finally, we get to the **last group**. The group nobody wants to choose from. These are the skinny nerds, the boys and girls who don't want to be there but got forced to play, and the kids that want to play, but lack size, height, and don't have that poor hand-eye coordination. These are the *freaks and geeks* nobody wants.

Do we ever treat our **faith** this way? We look at some people and say, "Wow, you would make a great Christian!" Some we think, "You'd do okay." And there are those that it's just like, "No way." Luke wrote his Gospel to show us the **types** of people Jesus **draws** to himself. Today we're in **Luke chapter 7**, but do you remember back in **Luke chapter 4** when Jesus described the **purpose** of his ministry?

#### **Luke 4:18-19**

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (NIV®)

So already, at the **beginning** of Jesus' ministry, when he is just starting out, we see Jesus intends to reach, the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed. They are all groups of people in that culture, and even in today's culture, that we wouldn't choose for a **winning** Christian team.

The best players, the most religious, the ones who knew their Scriptures the most were the Jews in that culture, especially the educated or socially active Jews, the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and teachers of the law. Jesus' hometown of **Nazareth** recognized his power, and thought he was going to "pick them first." But Jesus tells **two** stories to illustrate his message is for those **standing** on the **outside**.

**Luke 4:25-26** I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.

The region of Sidon was in ancient **Syria** in “the heartland of **Baal** worship.”<sup>1</sup> God sends **Elijah** out of the land of Israel to a place where people worship **demons**. Elijah actually ends up saving this woman and her son from **starvation**, but later her son dies from an **illness**. But Elijah performs a **miracle** and raises him from the dead (1 Kings 17:8-24). *Salvation is for outsiders*. And then Jesus continues.

**Luke 4:27** And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.” (NIV®)

This story comes in the time of **Elisha**, who lived around **850 years** before the birth of Jesus, and was Elijah’s **protégé**. Naaman, also from Syria and an enemy of the state of Israel, comes down with **leprosy**, but his Jewish servant **girl** says the prophet Elisha can heal him. His **king** gives him permission to go, and he travels from Syria to Israel. There Elisha says to **bathe** seven times in the **Jordan** river and he will be cured. At first he refuses, but then he washes, and is healed (2 Kings 5:1-14). *Salvation is for the outsider*.

Throughout the many books in the Bible, God is telling a **story**—how he loves to give **grace** to people who, at first glance, don’t look like his **kind** of people. That’s so different than we as a **culture** function. We like to choose the best and the brightest. Did you know the first episode of **American Idol** played in **2002**? That’s 16 years ago! The format of American Idol is pretty simple. A contest goes before a board of panelists and is judged on their **star potential**, which is some combination of how good they look and their ability to sing. And if the contestants could make it through the initial tryout, and Hollywood week, 24 of them were **rewarded** with being judged by the entire nation till just one was left. So it wasn’t just the Hollywood judges that picked their favorites, we did too. I **called in** to cast my **vote**! And now we have lots of tv shows just like this one where we can pick who is **in** and who is **out**.

The Bible tells us God isn’t a **panelist**. He doesn’t pick those with the greatest **star power**. He picks someone different. In **Luke 7**, Jesus’ **relives** those old stories from Elijah and Elisha’s days to demonstrate that he is the same God who chooses those on the **outside**.

In **Luke 7:11-17**, the passage right **after** our’s today, Jesus encounters a **widow** whose **son** has just died. It’s her only son, and so she is **destitute**. Her son was her **retirement plan**. Now she has no future, no grandkids, no one to take care of her. And what does Jesus do? He has **compassion** on her.

**Luke 7:13-15** When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”

Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. (NIV®)

Jesus does the **same thing** Elijah’s did! He raises the widow’s son, proving that Jesus is telling the **same story** of grace and redemption for the **needy** and the **poor**. Jesus loves the **underdogs** and those **picked last**. Jesus loves the *Sandlot* kids, the *Mighty Ducks*, the *Island of Misfit Toys*.

**Today’s** story comes right **before** the raising of the widow’s son. It’s the story of the **centurion** in Luke 7:1-10 and his **sick slave**. It **matches** or **parallels** the second story of Elisha healing **Naaman** the Syrian because they’re both foreigners that God heals (them directly, or their servant). Jesus has a Greek speaking Roman, a foreigner, send message to him to please come and heal his servant.

**Luke 7:1-3** When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.

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<sup>1</sup> ESV Study Bible. Crossway. 1 Kings 17:9 footnote. Page 632.

The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. (NIV®)

At first, when we hear about the centurion, we might think Jesus won't have anything to do with him. After all, a **centurion** commanded about **80-100** Roman soldiers, and the Romans had invaded Israel and were ruling **over** the Jews against their **will**. This centurion may have **killed** Jews with his own hand, or ordered his soldiers to take their lives. He's an **outsider**, but a **different kind** of outsider.

He falls into the **category** of people who are considered outsiders, but **personally**, he is actually quite **favored** by the Jews. If we're to go back to the sports **analogy**, he's like the **new kid** nobody wants to play with at first, until they find out he can pass like **Tom Brady**, then everyone wants to be his friend. The centurion may be a religious outsider, but because of the way he treats them, the Jewish people love him.

**Luke 7:4-6a** When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” So Jesus went with them. (NIV®)

This centurion seems like a man Jesus **should** heal. He cares for his **servant**, which is an unusual **character** quality at that time. Slaves could be **discarded** like property, but the Greek says his servant was “**precious**” to him (Lk 7:2). When he calls him his “servant” the second time, he uses the same Greek word for “**child**” (Lk 7:7). Jewish **elders** are willing to go and appeal to Jesus on this man's behalf, which is unusual. And they vouch for him that he **loves** Israel and even built them their **synagogue**, their version of a **church**. So it makes sense that Jesus would go with them, right? Because he **deserves** it. He's a **good guy**.

If I were to put up **two pictures** on the screen, one **photo** of the most loving, caring, and kind **person** you can think of, someone you know and love yourself, and the other photo of someone you do not like, and who you are pretty sure does not like you—in fact, the second person has been unkind and mean to you—which one of these people **deserves** Jesus' compassion more? The **good person**. Not the bad person. Right? But as we read the story, we see the “good guy” **admits** he's not a “good guy” at all. We **all** have sin in us.

**Luke 7:6b-7a** He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: “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. (NIV®)

Earlier, the elders said the centurion “**deserves**” Jesus to heal his servant. But what do we see the centurion saying about himself? He says, “I don't deserve you!” And then he says it **twice!** “I do not deserve to have you come under my roof” and “I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you” (v. 7). The centurion is demonstrating **amazing humility**. Jesus is a popular Jewish **Rabbi**. He's a **nobody** in **comparison** to the great nation of Rome. But the centurion humbles himself before him.

**How** often do we **approach** Jesus this way? Jesus, I'm not worthy to approach you. Jesus, all my merits are for nothing. I can't produce anything that makes me worth saving.

I want to stop for a moment and ask a **question**. What's the difference between outsiders Jesus **accepts** and those he doesn't? The answer is actually not their level of **poverty**. This man is **wealthy**. Is it because he's a **foreigner**? Some foreigners come to Jesus, and some don't. Jesus doesn't save us because of our **economic** or **social** status. It has entirely to do with our **faith**.

**Jesus saves the outsiders who put their faith in him.**

This centurion doesn't place his **hope** and **trust** in himself or his **merits** but in Christ's merits. He **admits** that even with all his good works and treating others fairly, he's not worthy. Rather, he places his hope and trust **in the person of Jesus, in who he is and what he can do.**

**Luke 7:7b-8** But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 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." (NIV®)

The Roman centurion uses his own **chain of command** as a way to illustrate the power Jesus has. At the **top** of this chain are those that have given him his authority, the Roman **Government, Caesar** (like our **Congress and President**). He is a military man, like an **officer** in our military. He uses the authority give to him to **control** those below him, his soldiers and his slaves, who carry out his commands and wishes (just like officers outrank and order enlisted men today). He says that Jesus has that **same kind of authority**. But Jesus is actually **more powerful** than him, because when Jesus **speaks** the physical world **reacts**. Jesus is on a **different** chain of command entirely, not **human** but **divine**. He has the power to **heal** with just his words. Although the centurion doesn't outright say it, he **implies** that only God could grant Jesus that kind of **authority**. He sees Jesus as being **something more** than just a Rabbi, he has the power of God. That's **faith!**

**Luke 7:9-10** 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 who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. (NIV®)

The word for **amazement** means "to **wonder**" or "to **marvel**." This word usually describes how people felt about Jesus and his miracles, but **twice** it's used to describe how Jesus himself felt, once at the unbelief of his hometown of **Nazareth** (Mark 6:6), and once right here at the faith of the centurion. Jesus marvels at the centurion's faith! He's **never met** the centurion, but the centurion believes from afar. The centurion isn't a practicing Jew, but he still believes. It's not that the people in Israel don't believe, but that this is the **greatest faith** Jesus has ever found. His faith is not placed in himself, but Christ.

And the story closes by saying they went home and found the servant well. Although Matthew's account is a little different, Luke **implies** that it wasn't Jesus' words that healed the man, but the centurion's own **faith**. This is what we call **resurrection faith**. He believed Jesus could **carry** his servant safely through the **storm of death**, and Jesus did just that.

There are **several applications** for us here. Saving faith does not approach Jesus with, "I **deserve** this" but rather "I don't deserve this." Saving faith doesn't say, "look at all the **good things** I've done, or the people I know, or all my **merits**" it says, "I am nothing. Look at Christ's merits." Saving faith doesn't say, "Look at **me, Jesus**" but "Look at you, Jesus." Saving faith says, "I am **unworthy** but he is **able**." Saving faith puts all of our hope and confidence in the person and power of Jesus Christ.

And the great news is, **anyone** can have this type of faith! Anyone can believe this way. Anyone can humble themselves and put all their hope and trust in Jesus to **deliver** them from **death**. If you **don't know Jesus**, if he hasn't saved you, he doesn't ask you to clean up your life before getting to know him. He doesn't say do **community service** or get off your **addiction** before he can love you. He doesn't even say you need to be like all the other **church people** and know all your **Bible stories**. He just invites you to come and **experience** his **power** to heal you. *Jesus saves any outsiders who put their faith in him.*

***Jesus saves the outsiders who put their faith in him.***

Are you an **outsider**? Do you ever feel like you're on a **sports-team lineup** and that Jesus is going down the lineup choosing the **best people** to play on his team? I think one of our **unspoken fears** is that when we **die**,

we will wake up to find that Jesus didn't pick us for his team, and that we will have to **sit out** while all the other kids play, the kids who are better, and smarter, the kids who did more for Jesus.

The **Gospel** tells us a different story. The Gospel tells us Jesus walks down the lineup and he doesn't look at what the other kids see. He doesn't look for the greatest achievers or the smartest kids. He doesn't look for the most religious or even those with the best character. He picks those who recognize they're **nothing** and **yearn** to be on Jesus' team. He **looks** for **faith**. To each one of those kids, Jesus gives his **team colors**, and says, "Come and **play on my team**." *Jesus saves the outsiders who put their faith in him.*

*Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here to listen to more sermons](#) or [click here to read our story](#).*