

Faith in Unexpected Places

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 November 2016

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 00] Well, thank you, Fraser, and a very warm welcome to Brunfield this morning. Is everyone well? Good. Well, can I encourage you to grab a Bible and turn expectantly to Luke chapter 7, and verses 1 to 10 is where we're going to camp out this morning. Turn to Luke chapter 7, and let's just, in the busyness of this morning, why don't we just gather our thoughts as we come to God's holy and inspired word, and let's pray together before we get into this.

Almighty God, and by astounding grace, our Heavenly Father, O Lord, we ask that as we turn to your word now, as we look again at this gospel of Luke, would you help us to see something more of the greatness, the all-surpassing greatness, of your Son, Jesus Christ? Would you help us not just to glimpse at him this morning, would you help us to grasp him this morning? Lord, we know our weakness. Lord, we know our wandering attentions. We know how easily distracted we are on Sunday mornings. So, Father, we ask that your Spirit would come, and that he would capture every wandering thought, and that he would channel it towards seeing more of Jesus Christ. And this is our prayer in our King's name. Amen.

So, my family and I, we had a lovely few days off at the tail end of last week, and I don't know if you do this, other people with kids here this morning, but what we did is when the girls went down to nap, Alex and I got really fond of turning on some daytime TV, just killing some time. So, we never really do this in normal life, I can assure you. Well, we turned on BBC One, and the first thing that came up was Bargain Hunt. Has anyone seen Bargain Hunt? So, I'd never seen this show before, but after an hour, turns out, we both absolutely love Bargain Hunt. So, we're watching Bargain Hunt. Never watched it before. If you've never watched it before, basically, there's two teams of two people, and their job is to go around a car boot sale and buy two or three items at a low price and try and sell at auction at a high price, and it's absolutely addictive, let me tell you. So, this week, I got a bit geeky, and I went googling things bought at car auctions, car boot sales rather, not car auctions,

I don't know what you buy at car auctions. Things bought at car boot sales. So, let me ask you a question this morning. What do you see when you look at that? What do you see? You see a bowl. That's what I see. I see a bowl. I see a very unspectacular bowl. I see a very ordinary bowl. Well, like as somebody in America looked at that bowl at a car boot sale, and they thought, probably good for the mantelpiece, put your keys in it, put your pens in it, just an ordinary bowl. They shelled out three bucks for that bowl. A few years later, somebody else looked at that bowl, and they identified it as a rare thousand-year-old Chinese bowl that previously belonged to one of China's most distinguished dynasties, and they paid 2.2 million bucks for that bowl. See, we're all into bargain hunt now, aren't we? All into bargain hunt. What do you see when you look at something? The big question for us this morning, as we come to Luke chapter 7, is what do we see as we look at Jesus? Luke is telling us in

Luke chapter 7 that getting identity right, it really, really matters. So before we get to Luke chapter 7, let's get in touch with our inner Greg Rutherford, and let's take a step back and try and get a run-up at Luke chapter 7. Here's the context. Luke chapter 6. Jesus has just delivered what would become arguably one of the most famous sermons in world history, the Sermon on the Mount.

[3 : 58] And he's been teaching the people about what life in his kingdom looks like. It's his kingdom that brings hope and life. My kingdom, says Jesus, that lifts up the poor and the oppressed. My kingdom that turns the other cheek. My kingdom that loves and goes towards enemies. And he's speaking of his kingdom in Luke chapter 6. And his hearers are hearing this. He's inviting them to come. Come to him. Come and deny yourself. Come and repent of your sin. Come to me and take me as your king. Come to me and have your heart. Come to me and be part of this kingdom. Make this kingdom life. Make it your life.

And he ends with a challenge to his hearers at verse 47. His challenge is, what are you going to do with my words? What are you going to do? Are you going to do them? Or are you going to dismiss them? Are my words going to become a foundation for your life?

Or are you just going to forget them? Because it's the wise man, says Jesus, it's the wise man who builds his house upon the rock of my words.

Now I don't know how you felt as we left that chapter last week. I left thinking to myself, I wonder what that person looks like. Now you know when you go for a job and you look at a job advert and the job advert gives you a person spec? You ever seen that? And you know what it says, don't you? It says we're looking for this kind of person. And it says we're looking for attention to detail. We're looking for good time management skills. We're looking for good people skills.

And you're looking at this person spec and you're thinking, I wonder what that person looks like. What does that person look like? Well, here we have the kingdom person spec that Jesus has just laid out. And we should be wondering as readers this morning, who is this person? What do kingdom people, what do they look like? What does it look like to be a person that builds your life on the rock?

[6 : 29] Now I think that's the exact question that Luke wants his readers to be asking at this point. And so it's no coincidence then that Luke starts to give us faces, people. He said to say this is what it looks like to respond to Jesus. And as we meet these people in Luke chapter 7, we see that they've got one thing in common. And it's not nationality. And it's not gender. And it's not age. And it's not class. What these people have in common, what kingdom people have in common is that they look at the king and they grasp his identity. So Luke introduces us to this man at the beginning of Luke chapter 7.

Let's read it together. Verse 1, reading to verse 10. After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.

Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. When a centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and to heal his servants. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, he is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation and he is the one who built us our synagogue. 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.

Therefore, I did not presume to come to you, but say the word and let my servant be healed. 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. 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. And when those had been sent, returned to the house, they found the servant well. So notice three things about this man as we meet him in these verses. Firstly, notice where this man is. He's in Capernaum. There's a village.

[9 : 09] The name Capernaum, it means village of comfort. And as we've seen already in Luke's gospel, that is massively appropriate. Because Jesus has been here before. If you've got your Bibles there, if you flick back a couple of pages to chapter 4 and verse 31, you'll see the astounding things that Jesus did on the day that he was previously in Capernaum.

He taught. What does it say? And the people recognized that his words possessed authority. And as the sun set and that day drew in, we're told that one by one, people brought to Jesus all friends and family who were sick and ill. And one by one, he healed a few of them, a couple of them.

No, he healed. Do you see what it says? All of them. He healed all of them. Now, I've got a funny sense of imagination. I was picturing this week, the Capernaum Royal Infirmary.

Picture it in your head. Surgeons twiddling their thumbs. Pharmacists doodling on their prescription pads. The A&E; department absolutely empty. Why? Because there's nothing to do. Why?

Because there's nobody needing treated. Jesus has healed all the people. Such is the great authority of his words. And that was a day in the life of this village that would go into the village folklore. It was a day that people would never tire speaking of to anybody anywhere who would care to listen. Why? Because this village has seen nothing like that day. And so here we are in verse one of chapter seven, and we're told that Jesus once again enters Capernaum. And so one can only imagine the levels of expectation and the levels of excitement as news gets around this village that Jesus is back in town. And that's where this man is. He's in Capernaum. Secondly, notice who this

man is.

[11 : 25] He's a soldier. He's a Roman centurion, which means he's probably got oversight, command of up to 100 men. He's a man that commands a serious amount of kudos, a serious amount of respect. And he's able to influence people. And he's able to assert power. In fact, the only reason that he's in Capernaum is that his job has taken him there. And his job is simply to keep the peace. So that's who this man is. But notice thirdly, what this man is. He's worried. In fact, he's more than worried. He is distressed. Why? Because the servant whom he loves is dying. And he is a man who cares for his servant. And he is desperate to see his servant healed.

And here we have a powerful man realizing that he is powerless to do anything about his servant's predicament. And what does Luke tell us at verse 3? Key word for us this morning. The centurion heard about Jesus Christ.

Heard what? Well, he's probably heard about that time when Jesus was previously in Capernaum. I'd imagine he's heard about the teaching of Jesus that day. He's had verified to him the healings of that day. He's heard about the undeniable authority that Jesus exercised and demonstrated that day.

And so us, as the readers, as we see this man, as we read about this man hearing about Jesus, the question that we've got to ask is what will he do upon hearing? Will he be a wise man who builds his life on the rock of Jesus' words? Or will he be a foolish man and just forget about Jesus?

On paper, this outsider, this enemy of the Jews, this man with power, how will he respond? What does he see as he looks at Jesus?

[13 : 37] Well, Luke draws our attention, I think, to two particular things that this man has grasped. And I think they are so massively important as we read this this morning. Two things that he has grasped. Firstly, he has grasped his true identity. So as we pick up the narrative again at verse 3 of chapter 7, Jesus, as he enters Capernaum, do you notice he is met by a group of elders, Jewish elders.

In fact, we're told that these elders were sent by the centurion himself. Now, two things are striking about that. Firstly, it is striking the mutual relationship of respect that is developed between this centurion and these Jewish elders. That is massively striking. Roman soldiers, not in the habit of making friends with Jews. Jews, definitely not in the market for making a Roman friend.

That's striking. But secondly, the thing that is striking is look how they describe this man. Look at the glowing report they give of this man to Jesus. Jesus, he loves our nation.

He is kind to us. He looks favorably on us. He is a generous man. In fact, do you know, I want you to know, we want you to know that he has given money to the building of our meeting place, the synagogue.

So they look at this centurion and they conclude, verse 4, he is worthy. He deserves.

[15 : 13] And so Jesus goes with them. And on the way to the man's house, verse 6, we read that Jesus is intercepted by another group sent by the centurion, this time bringing him news from the centurion that Jesus need not bother coming all the way to his house. Why? Because he does not think he deserves to have Jesus come under his roof. Look at verse 7. What does he say? I am not worthy.

Now that is a astounding admission. I wonder how you would have reacted if you were the centurion when you heard about Jesus. How would you have reacted? I was reading a story this week about David Hasselhoff.

2006, he goes down to Wimbledon. Chances his arm tries to get into the player's lounge after the games. Gets turned away at the door, understandably not being a player. And he says simply to the guy in the door, you clearly don't know who I am. Clearly don't know who I am.

I think I would have gone all hoff on Jesus here if I was a centurion. Jesus, have a listen to everything that I've done for you and yours. Have a listen to how people respect me. Would you look around and see what I do?

All I'm asking, I'm not asking for a lot, all I'm asking is just to call in a little favor from you here. Now we laugh, but it's a very common attitude towards God in our day, isn't it?

[16 : 50] It's a vending machine understanding of God. If I put the right amount in for God, then I'm entitled to get something out. Back from God. Tip for tat, if I scratch God's back, he'll scratch mine.

God, do you not understand? Do you not see that I've chosen to come here on a Sunday morning when I could be out having 18 holes on the golf course? Do you not understand that I'm here, that

I've given up watching the Grand Prix to come and be at church this morning with your people? Do you not see what I do for you?

Now we never term it as such, but really that attitude is just karma masquerading as Christianity. Let me ask you if you're here this morning, and that is how you understand how God operates. How refreshingly different then is this man as we meet him in Luke chapter 7? Here is a centurion with a true estimation of himself.

Here is a man who recognizes the deep and dark chambers of his heart. Here is a man who is marked by meekness. Here is a man who has made himself low before God.

[18:03] Here is a man whose life is marked by humility. And what does he conclude as he hears about Jesus? I am not worthy. You see, this centurion, what an example of what it means to grasp your own true identity before a holy God.

Here is the second thing that this centurion has grasped. He has grasped Jesus' true identity. Look at how he addresses Jesus at verse 6 if you've got it there. How does he address him? Lord.

Now that is a fascinating confession considering that this man is a Gentile. That is an even more fascinating confession when you consider that this man is a Roman soldier.

That term, he would have been used to using it to refer to the emperor. A Gentile Roman soldier of all people. Get your heads around this.

All people. A stranger to the privileges of being Jewish. A man with limited understanding of the scriptures. He saw in Jesus what many people of Jesus' day, many of his own Jewish fraternity, what they didn't see.

[19:15] This man hears the reports. He's heard the teaching. And he's looked at Jesus. And he's concluded, son of God. That's how this man responds as he hears about Jesus.

Let me ask you again. What do you see as you look at Jesus? C.S. Lewis famously said about Jesus, you must make your choice.

You can shut him up for a fool. You can spit at him and kill him as a demon. Or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. The centurion, he looks at Jesus and concludes, Lord and God. And he does it because he looks at Jesus and he thinks, there is simply none that compares with this man. Carnegie Simpson, famous free church minister of yesteryear, he said this, Jesus is not one of the group of world's great.

Talk about Alexander the Great and Charles the Great and Napoleon the Great, if you will. Jesus is a part. He is not the great. He is the only.

[20:33] He is the only. There is simply none that compares with this man, according to the centurion. And let's be honest, the centurion, he knows all about authority, doesn't he? He knows all about authority.

His job is one where he points and people do. He instructs. He delegates and he commands. He says and people do for him. And what does he understand?

He understands that Jesus, just like I say to people and they do, you say to things and they do whatever you tell them to do.

That's what he understands. What marvelous reverence for the word of the king. Now I'm thinking about it this week, thinking how does this apply to my Christian life?

And I was really challenged this week about, have I got that same reverence for the word of the king? Do I bow to his word? Do I submit to his every command?

[21:34] When I read the Bible in the morning, do I rush into reading it? Or do I stop and humble myself and think about what I am reading? This is no ordinary book.

This is God's word. This is the voice of the king. Now I wonder for some of us here this morning, as I've been praying about it in preparation this week, I wonder if some of us need to recapture reverence. I wonder if some of us need to reignite a passion for Jesus Christ and an understanding and a reverence and a submission and a bowing to his words.

This is the word of the king. This is what the centurion recognizes. Here is a man who knows the power of Jesus. So much so, do you notice in this account that he knows with one word, with one word, Jesus can heal his servants.

And Jesus doesn't even need to be physically there to do it. And on that note, isn't it interesting in this account that Jesus and the centurion, they never actually meet face to face?

Really interesting. Surely Luke is showing his readers here that not having face time with Jesus, just because you don't have face time with him is no barrier to not believing and trusting in him.

[22 : 51] And I think that's where this passage gives us a great model of the biblical understanding of faith, the biblical concept of faith. Just think about it in your own life this morning.

I was thinking of Beth when she was up here. She was talking about her work colleagues, how they think of her. Just think about your situation for a minute. Think about your friends, your non-believing friends. Think about your non-believing family.

As they ask you about your faith, what do you say your faith is? As we live in a world where people like Richard Dawkins, and I've got him down quoting here, he calls faith the great cop-out.

How would you respond to that? I think that's a great question to be thinking about from this passage, but it's a great question as well, and can I encourage you to do this, to talk about after the service this morning.

We're going to be talking about it in our small groups this week as well. How do you answer that question to your non-believing friends? What is faith? You know, surely here this passage tells us that biblical faith is not about having face time with Jesus.

[23 : 57] Biblical faith is the idea of hearing the evidence, and going with the evidence, and leaning the whole way of your life in trust on the word of the king.

That's what true faith is. Great thing to be talking about after the service. How can we be encouraging each other in this? The centurion, he grasps the true identity of Jesus Christ.

And see at verse 9, what does Jesus say? Such faith, he marvels at such faith.

Marvels at such faith. Really interesting that in the Gospels, Jesus has only said to marvel at two things. Mark chapter 6 is the first place we see Jesus marveling, and it's at the unbelief of his own people, his hometown people.

They don't get who he is, and Jesus marvels at their unbelief. And the second one is here, Luke chapter 7. What is Jesus marveling at?

[25 : 01] He's marveling at the faith of this outsider, this centurion, this rank outsider. He sees Jesus, and he gets it. He gets who Jesus is.

And what does Jesus say? I have not found such great faith, even in Israel. And just in case we were in any doubt as to the ability of Jesus to heal, we're told about him healing the centurion's servant at the end of verse 10.

Check it out. And it's really interesting as you read it through. I wonder if you noticed it as we read it at the start, as we get to verse 10. In fact, it's only the last word of verse 10.

It's only the last word of this section that we find out the fate of the servant. Look at it with me. And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant what?

Dead? Struggling? No. They found him well. There's a sense of inevitability about it, isn't it, as we read it here.

[26 : 05] Luke is saying to us, well, of course Jesus' word was able to heal. Of course he was able to do that, because his word is powerful. His word is life-giving, and his word is life-restoring.

And it's true for us today. You know, there's no promise here of being healed like the servant was. Servant was. There's no guarantee of that. But we are to know that Jesus' word will, and it can, bring healing to those who trust in him and submit to him as Lord and King one day when he brings in his kingdom.

His word is powerful. And as we come into land this morning, would you notice verse 9? Having marveled at the centurion's faith, what does Jesus do?

He turns to the crowd that are following him, and he effectively says, what about you then? What about you then? Are you going to grasp my true identity like the centurion has, or are you just going to pass me on by like everybody else?

You know, I was telling you at the beginning about that bowl that was worth 2.2 million pounds. I was thinking on it this week. When the identity of that, the true identity of that bowl was revealed, apart from the buyer, there would have been two very different reactions to that, wouldn't there?

[27 : 27] Imagine you're the seller of that bowl. You'd bought it for three bucks. You'd sold it for 2.2 million. I mean, pina colodas on you every night, right? You are celebrating when the true identity fully comes home to you.

And I bet your bank manager was probably celebrating as well. But picture the scene of the, him or her, whoever it was, the person who sold it for three dollars, and eventually finds out it was actually worth 2.2 million.

What Luke is telling us in this passage is that don't pass over, pass over at your pearl, the true identity of this man Jesus. Grasp him, come to him, take him as your king, see him for who he is, and be, like the centurion, a wise man who builds your house on the rock of Jesus Christ.

Let me pray. Let me pray. And maybe let's just pause for a moment's silence as we respond to God's word this morning, and then we'll close with our final hymn.

Let's just be quiet for a minute. And so, gracious God, and loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

[28 : 48] We thank you so much for the example of faith and trust that we have in Luke chapter 7. So, Father, our prayer is that you would help us this week, whatever we're doing, with whoever we're with, to be those who stand on the word of the king, to be those who trust the word of the king, and to be those who love the word of the king.

And so it's in the king's name, the almighty name of Jesus Christ, that we pray these things. Amen. Amen. Thank you.