

## **The Real Marvel As Jesus Saw It**

I want to read you a story this morning that has always fascinated me. I love this scene in the Bible because here we meet the man that made Jesus marvel. What a thought! Let's read it together, Luke 7:1 – 10.

**Luke 7:1-10 – “After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. 3 When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. 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.” 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. 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.” 9 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.” 10 And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.”**

Imagine what is being reported here in this story, that one day, a Roman Centurion called to Jesus for help. The occupying force of Israel at that time, the leader of one of Israel's enemies called to Jesus for help. This centurion is no ordinary rank and file soldier. He is specifically called a centurion. A centurion in the Roman army meant that he was an officer and was responsible for roughly 100 soldiers. Six centurions made up a Roman Cohort, so that was around 600 men lead by 6 officers. Ten Cohorts made up a Legion. So a Legion was 6000 men plus officers in the Roman army.

I have heard people say that a Legion was a thousand, it wasn't, it was 6000 men. You might remember that when Jesus was arrested in the garden of Gethsemane and he was going to be put on trial, one of his disciples, Peter, tried to defend Jesus with a sword but Jesus stopped him. And Matthew records what happened in Matthew chapter 26. In verse 53, Jesus said **“Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53)**

Think about that. Twelve legions of angels. That's 12 times 6000. That's 72 thousand angels. He has a small mob with some soldiers coming to arrest him in the garden and he tells them that he can call 72 thousand angels if he wanted to. And don't think about little fluttering Valentine's day baby cherubs with harps, think about enormous warrior angels, the Host of the Lord.

Do you think Jesus was concerned about being overpowered by a few soldiers and a mob? He was in total control of the proceedings that night. That is exactly what he said the next morning to Pontius Pilate in his courtroom. He said in John 19:11 "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above." Make no mistake about it, nobody ever took Jesus' life from him, he laid it down, he gave it up. He could have called 12 legions of angels but he didn't.

Anyways, back to today's passage. The point is Roman armies were made up of these legions of 6000 men, each legion was made up of 10 cohorts of 600 men each and each cohort was led by 6 centurions who were responsible for 100 men each. So in today's language, the centurion was like the captain in the army and they were the backbone of the mighty Roman military, the centurions.

The historian Polybius wrote about the qualifications for becoming a centurion. He said *"They must not be so much seekers after danger, as men who can command, steady in action and reliable, they ought not to be anxious to rush into the fight but when hard pressed, they must be ready to hold their ground and die at their posts."*

These were great soldiers, well-trained soldiers. We meet several centurions in the New Testament. The first one we meet is right here in this passage in Luke 7. We meet another centurion at the cross when Jesus was being crucified, who at the end of the crucifixion, looked up at Jesus on the cross and declared "Surely this was a righteous man." And then we meet one other centurion by the name Cornelius, who called for the Apostle Peter in the book of Acts to come and preach the Gospel to him.

So think about that, each centurion that the Bible records was a man of character. They were usually older men, usually harder soldiers who had experienced a lot of bloodshed and cruelty in battle to get ready for the position of responsibility. They were mature warriors and leaders of men. Now what would you expect people to think of a man like this? Put yourself in the shoes of the Jewish people who were living in Capernaum on the day this took place. The Jews were a conquered, oppressed people under the occupying force of the iron Roman rule. What would they think of this centurion?

There was not a lot of love lost between the Jews and the Roman occupying force, so they would have viewed him normally with suspicion, they would have held him at arm's length as they would have been afraid of him.

How should this powerful military leader see himself? He's been put in an enormous place of responsibility. He's got men under him and he's got incredible power in this situation. How should he see himself? But more importantly than anything else, how do you think God would see such a man? How would God see him?

Well this story is full of surprises. This morning, I want you to sail four great see's with me. This first one is this.

## **1) HOW THE WORLD SEES YOU?**

Luke begins his account of what happened that day with a little bit of backstory. He tells us something about why this centurion was calling for Jesus. This centurion had a servant. Now if you read that in the Greek, it literally means "a slave." He had a slave that was very sick, in fact, he was at the point of death. And Luke says that the slave was highly valued or dear to the centurion. That begins to tell us something right away about this centurion. He was a compassionate man. In spite of how the Jews would look on these Roman soldiers, in spite of the kind of military man that he was, he was a compassionate man.

He had heard about Jesus and obviously he had been told about the amazing miracles that Jesus had been working and the authority in which Jesus was teaching, and the centurion sent word to see if Jesus would come and do something for his servant. If the stories were true, maybe Jesus could heal his servant.

Matthew recounts this same story as well in his gospel but he seems to tell it just a little bit differently. Because of this, some people say "Oh, there's a contradiction here, Luke doesn't line up with Matthew." It's not a contradiction at all.

Matthew seems to say that the centurion came and spoke to Jesus, while here Luke says that he sent some Jewish friends to get Jesus. So it's not a contradiction because Luke is just filling in more detail with all that is happening here.

If Prime Minister Trudeau sent an ambassador to Kim Jong-un of North Korea to let him know Canada would help with their influx of Covid cases, I am sure that the headlines the next day would say "Trudeau tells Jong-un Canada will help." That's a perfectly accurate report. You would have to read further into the story to find out that Trudeau didn't actually see or talk to Jong-un but he sent an ambassador, he sent a

messenger. And that's clearly what's happening between the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke. These two different accounts.

So these Jewish friends of the centurion came and spoke to Jesus on his behalf. One of the reasons they may have come instead of the centurion coming himself is because of the normal relationship that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles, particularly between the Jews and the Romans, and very particularly between the occupying Romans soldiers and Jewish people. Under normal circumstances, this Roman centurion would have probably expected that a Jewish Rabbi would ignore him completely because they were seen as the spiritual guides of the people of Israel. Many of the rabbis would have seen it as their duty to not show any kind of response to these Roman occupiers at all. "We only have one king and that is God Jehovah." That would have been their response.

What's astonishing is that this group of Jewish people actually agreed to represent the centurion to Jesus. They clearly admired him and they commended him to Jesus. You wouldn't have seen that every day. Look at verses 4 & 5.

**Luke 7:4-5 - "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.'"**

So how did other people see this man? He had the trust of Rome, otherwise he wouldn't have this job as a centurion. He had the respect of his 100 soldiers, and I can tell you that because the Roman army was a very discipline force. But he had even won the respect and the love of the local Jewish people. He was seen as a benevolent man, he was a kind man, he was a good man. "He loves our nation, he even built us a synagogue" they said. He obviously had some money too. He built them a synagogue. And look at what they said about him to Jesus. "He is worthy, he is deserving that you should answer this request." He is worthy of it, he has done enough to earn it from you, Jesus."

The world looked on this man and they saw some of his deeds and they liked what they saw. They looked at the kind of person he was and they liked him. The bible says in **Proverbs 20:6** that "**Most men will proclaim, every one, his own goodness**" and that's true. Go down onto Main street after church and ask people, "Do you think you're a good person?" I can predict what they will respond to you with. 99.9 percent of them will say "Yes, I think I am a good person." You will even get people who will say, "ask my friends, they think I'm a good person." And that is what matters to us; it's what we derive our self-esteem from. How the world sees you.

This centurion had every reason to think highly of himself. Every man loves to proclaim his own goodness. He could have done this because the world thought highly of him. In their eyes, he was worthy, and listen, if you're in an enemy town perceived as the oppressor, that's really quite surprising that people would like you.

What is even more surprising is then how this centurion responded to the admiration of men. Cause it leads us to the second thing in this story which is:

## 2) HOW YOU SEE YOURSELF

**Luke 7:6-7 – “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. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.”**

So everyone is saying he's worthy, and he's saying, “No, I'm not worthy!” This is surprising. Can I just pause here for a second and say this. One of the most perilous things you can do in life is start believing your own publicity. When people say nice things and flatter you because that will puff you up with pride, it will change your perspective.

This centurion was not self-confident even though other people said nice things about him. He didn't believe his own publicity. He knew in his heart of hearts, what his own standing was in life, what his own standing was before God. You might ask, “did this centurion even believe in God?” As a Roman, he would have believe in a lot of gods, due to the number that the romans worshipped. But I think it's significant that it says he built them a synagogue. This is a man whose heart is open to the true and the living God, the God that the Jews worshipped.

I think that he had come into this area and it had impacted him. To see the worship of the true and the living God. So his heart is open and he knows his own standing with God. “I am not worthy.” The world will try to lull you into a false sense of security but this centurion knew how many times every single day, he fell short of God's standards. He knew that he, like all of us, was finding it impossible to measure up.

If you were honest this morning, how many of you would say that you can't measure up to your own standards? Let alone God's standards? We find we can't even keep our own requirements for how a person should live. And he openly admitted, “I am not worthy, not even to have Jesus come into my house. I didn't even want you to trouble yourself walking down the road, Jesus, you could've just sent word. I'm not worthy of you coming here.”

The problem is that so many people are trying to impress God with their religion to get his attention. Millions of people are attempting to show God that they are worthy of him to approve of them. “Look, I built a synagogue.” “Look, I gave money to the church.” “Look, I help old ladies across the street.” “I rescue hurt animals, I give to charity. Look at what kind of a person I am.”

The Jews were concerned with the centurion’s worthiness, they believed him to be worthy, after all, he built them a synagogue. The centurion himself, was also concerned about his own worthiness but for another reason. He did not see himself as worthy at all.

What is the standard? If other people are the standard, then I will be able to convince myself that I am not that bad. “At least I am not an ax murderer.” How many of you have ever heard that? That’s not much of a standard, is it? “At least I am not an ax murderer. At least I am not like that guy over there. I’m not like that obnoxious person. He lies, he cheats, he’s gone to prison, he’s done this, he’s done that. At least I am not like them.” “I’m not Deborah Sirjoosingh, I’m not maybe at that standard, but at least I’m not an ax murderer.”

So we say we’re not that bad really, the problem is, whoever is on the highest rung of holiness in this life, whomever you think is the holiest person is in this life, they are so far short of God’s glory themselves, they’re not the standard. God is the standard, who is absolutely holy and perfect, just, true, never makes a mistake, never sins, never ever does anything evil, there’s no shadow of turning in him, absolutely no changeability in him, he is the standard! And how do you see yourself in the light of that?

But still, so many people become intoxicated with their own importance. The bible says in **Romans 12:3** “**Don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought to think.**” There is nothing on earth quite as rare as a person with an honest self-appraisal, who can look at them self and see them self truly. Turn with me to James 4 starting at verse 6:

**James 4:6-10 - “But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” [7] Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. [8] Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Be wretched (some say lament) and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”**

That's what the Bible tells you to do, it's not what the world tells you to do. The world says "Eat, drink and be merry", the bible says "Lament, mourn and weep." The bible say you need to humble yourself, not climb the ladder.

So this centurion didn't believe his own publicity. The world saw him as worthy, but he knew the real truth and here he is humbling himself in the sight of the Lord. He's a captain in the Roman army, he has authority over this region, and yet he bows before this rabbi and says "I'm not worthy."

The third thing is:

### 3) HOW YOU SEE JESUS

**Luke 7:7-8 – “Therefore I did not presume to come to you. 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.”**

Here we get to it, the most important matter of all because today, the day that we live in, the holy grail that everyone says you've got to find, that everyone is chasing after is a good self-esteem. You have to think good of yourself, think well of yourself. Good self-esteem.

But I want to tell you that from a bible perspective, a good self-esteem is not important at all. What is important is proper Christ esteem. It's not how you see yourself, it's how you see Jesus Christ. That changes everything. This centurion realized something Jesus. He saw in him the authority of a super power kingdom. He said "Jesus, I know who you are." He says, "I am a man under authority." He knew that the whole of Rome was behind him and he would do as he was told, but because Rome was behind him, he could tell soldiers what to do, he could tell servants what to do and they obeyed him. He was a man under authority and you could imagine him thinking "I see the authority you have, you are working miracles, you are speaking with such incredible teaching authority, I see all of this and I see you are backed by amazing authority."

Ivor Powell wrote about this. He said "*The officer saw Caesar's kingdom and recognized that the weight of his own commands was only explained by the authority he represented. He also saw a greater empire in which Jesus of Nazareth held high office. The teacher represented eternal powers and unseen angelic servants that were waiting to fulfill his desires.*"

The centurion sees and recognizes a man with true authority. See what he said, “But say the word. Just give the order.” The centurion knew something about this because giving orders that would be instantly obeyed was his business. He understood this, he did it all the time. It was his job to understand authority, he was under authority. He had authority and he was able to recognize authority here on assignment in Palestine peace-keeping. It was his job to know who was the most important people in the town, who were the most important people in the nation, he knew how to deal with them because he had to keep the peace in Palestine.

If the police show up at your door with a warrant, and they tell you to open up, you would be very foolish not to open the door. I don’t know about now, but they used to say “Open up in the name of the law.” In the name of the law. They are backed by an authority, it’s not just empty words. You might think, there’s just one little police officer out there, I can take him. Problem is, if you don’t cooperate, within a few minutes there will be half a dozen squad cars outside your house and you have a major issue. Keep resisting and more show up and soon that one police officer would have SWAT team backing him up and if it continued to escalate, RCMP and who knows, maybe even the military. That one police officer is a man under authority.

You can never have real authority until you are under authority. The centurion recognized in Jesus, one with great and true authority. How do you see Jesus today? Do you recognize who he is? Do you recognize him as the Lord of Heaven, the King of Kings, the one who is coming to reign and rule forever, the one who spoke the world into existence? Do you realize who Jesus is?

This centurion instantly recognized the authority of Jesus. And finally, I said we would sail the four sees and here’s the fourth see:

#### **4) HOW THE LORD SEES YOU**

How did Jesus see this centurion? Look at verse 9.

**Luke 7:9 – “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.”**

You guys look down on gentiles, you look down on the Romans, you can’t stand them but I want to tell you something, I have been teaching all over the area and I haven’t found a Jewish person with this kind of faith. He says “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.”

Look at the word “marvel.” He marveled at the centurion. There’s only twice that we read that Jesus marveled, that he wondered. It’s only two times in the Bible. It’s here and the other time is when the inhabitants of Nazareth did not believe in him. Isn’t that interesting? The only other time that Jesus marveled was when he went to his hometown and they just rejected him. They said, “Oh, he’s just Joseph’s son” and they did not believe.

Look at this, Jesus marvels at the unbelief of friends and he marvels at the faith of strangers. He marvels. Jesus was not concerned with this centurion’s nationality, his status, his titles, his reputation, he was concerned with his heart. He did not say “I haven’t found too many people willing to build synagogues, we better look after this guy.” He didn’t care that the man had built synagogues, he didn’t care what the man had done, he said “I have not seen such faith as I see in this man.”

He was concerned about the centurion’s humble, trusting heart that was turned towards God for help.

Listen to 1 Samuel chapter 16, verse 7

**1 Samuel 16:7 – “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature...”**

This occasion was when David was young and was brought with his brothers down in front of Samuel because Samuel had been commanded to anoint a new king in Israel. And he went down and saw that these brothers of David were big burly boys, they were fighting men already, they were in the army, and they thought for sure that one of them was going to be chosen to be king. But in the end, God picked none of them and it came down to the last of them, David, a shepherd boy who was out in the fields, who was a little bit young, and look at what the Bible says,

**1 Samuel 16:7 – “But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”**

God has never once been impressed by a big personality, he’s never been impressed by a magazine cover, God does not look on people the way that we do, the way we esteem one against another. The Lord looks straight to the heart, he knows what’s in people’s heart. True faith will always end up doing great things. Great things are the result of faith, the result of simply depending on God, seeing who Jesus is, seeing what authority he has, seeing how bankrupt we are, and putting our trust in him. People

become very impressed with resulting deeds, but God is interested in the source, the faith that produces those things.

Jesus looks at the man and say “Boy, I’m marveled. I have not found faith like this in all of Israel.” How we need to get a right view of ourselves, that’s what this story is telling us. A right view of ourselves and a right view of God. God acts for those who look at themselves humbly and who look to him with faith. They look away from themselves to Him, that’s who God acts for. We are not living in days where we can afford to kid ourselves any longer. We are moments from midnight, the bell is about to toll for us and the whole world, that Jesus is coming back.

How do you see him? Are you prepared for him, are you waiting for him, are you watching for him? If you’re not, if it’s all about you and what you think about yourself, pride paves the way to destruction. Let me go back and read James chapter 4:

**James 4:10 - “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”**

Little reminder on the basics (Fresh Start class). Here’s how you become a Christian. It’s not by joining a particular church or denomination. It’s not by going through religious rituals. It’s not by following some set teaching plan. The way that you become a Christian, which means “Christ’s one or Christ’s follower,” the way that you become one is that first you recognize you need him. That you have nothing in yourself, no matter what the world says about you, no matter what you have achieved, no matter what title or station you have in life, you lay all of that down, and you recognize. Others might think well of me but I know my own heart. You admit that you are a sinner, you admit that you have broken God’s law and have fallen short of his standards, but then you say, “I know Jesus is not like me, he is the one that I can turn to, he can save me, he can help me, he can lift me, he can raise me, he can break my addictions, he can bring me out of bondage. God through Jesus Christ can change my life. You cast yourself upon him, that’s how you become a Christian.

This morning, what do you think of yourself? Here’s what I know about human beings. You can have a thousand people around you every day telling you how wonderful you are. This is what I know about Hollywood celebrities, they have people all the time fawning over them, putting them on red carpets, putting lights on them, saying how marvelous they are, writing magazine covers about them. And then they get to their house, they put their head on their pillow at night and say “It’s all smoke and mirrors because I know who I really am. They think I am all that, but I know that I don’t measure up to my own standards, let alone anyone else’s.”

That's true of you, isn't it? That's true of me. That we all fall short of our own standards, let alone the standards of a Holy God. But if we can see in Jesus, the one who is different, if we come and cast ourselves upon him, if we will humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, he will lift us up.

God says, whoever calls on the name of Jesus will be saved. If you come to him, he will rescue you and change everything.

Let's pray.