

**LUKE 7:1-10**  
**THE STORY OF FAITH**

Scene One: Creation. Scene Two: Fall. Now we enter the third of the five scenes of the story of our God, our world, and our lives: redemption. Lord willing, we will journey through this scene by visiting several places in the gospel of Luke. We will watch Jesus meet a variety of people. Their stories will teach us about this scene of redemption.

Yes, we have skipped a lot of the Old Testament! Those stories prepare us for the coming of Jesus - the offspring of the woman promised after the fall. We see the connection at the beginning of Luke's gospel, in the words of Zechariah. After he learns that his son John will prepare the way for the promised Savior, Zechariah praises God for coming and redeeming his people. God has remembered his holy covenant with Abraham. He has come to rescue his people from his enemies, and to free them to serve him, just as he promised long ago.

That is what redemption is: rescue to freedom. It is rescue from the sin that keeps us in the hands of Satan, and it is freedom to know and serve God again. That is the story of the Christian. We are a redeemed people - fallen creatures who have been freed from death to new life in Jesus. Let's start to discover this redemption by meeting a man we know as the centurion.

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Would you please take a look under the hood of my car? Would you please unclog the pipes under my kitchen sink? Would you please put a new lock on that door? Would you please rewire and hang that light? Would you please clear and secure that dryer vent? Would you please tile that bathroom floor? Would you please find and fix that leak in my roof? Would you please re-design and re-structure the shelving in my garage? Would you please find a way to get that stupid lawn mower to start?

Most of you know that I am as handy as a counterfeit three-dollar bill. Over the last few years, I have asked people to help me in all of those ways and more. I cannot do it. I need you to do for me, what I cannot do for myself. We might say I have faith in you.

The story of our redemption begins with faith. In the centurion, we see faith that amazes even Jesus. From his story, I learn about my story. I discover that true faith is when I confess who I am, and when I profess who Jesus is. With these truths filling my heart and fueling my life, I live my story in a new way.

Faith begins with this: **I CONFESS WHO I AM**. We discover this when we think about what the centurion could say to Jesus, and what he does say to Jesus. Let's think first of *WHAT HE COULD SAY*.

The setting is the town of Capernaum. This is a little burg on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is along one of the trade routes that cross through the Roman Empire. This means it has a customs post (where taxes are collected) and a military outpost (where Roman soldiers keep the peace in this occupied territory).

The man who contacts Jesus is a centurion. He is a military commander over a group called a "cohort." This is a collection of seventy to a hundred soldiers. This centurion is a man of some position and prominence in the Roman army, and in the Capernaum community.

The centurion sends people to Jesus, because his servant is sick. In Matthew's gospel, we learn that this servant has an illness that has paralyzed him. He is suffering terribly. This centurion thinks highly of his servant, so he longs for his healing.

The centurion sends "elders of the Jews" to Jesus. He clearly has a good relationship with these Jewish leaders. They speak well of the centurion, because they say he "loves our nation and has built our synagogue." He has open respect for the Jewish people, and he has allowed them to build a synagogue to worship the true God. This is unusual! Relations between the Romans and the Jews are generally tense. But it is different with this centurion.

So here is a Roman official, doing Roman work around Jewish people, and he is represented by some of those Jewish people, who think highly of him. Think of what he could say: "Jesus, I am a good guy. I have

been good to your people, so you ought to be good to me. I deserve to have you heal my servant.”

That is what these Jewish leaders are essentially saying. They come to Jesus and declare, “This man deserves to have you do this.” He is worthy of this blessing in his life, because of the goodness of what he has done. So they say. So he could have said.

But now let’s notice *WHAT HE DOES SAY*. In verse 6, as Jesus walks toward the centurion’s home, the centurion sends more friends to say to Jesus, “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.”

Do you see the irony here? The Jews say, “This man deserves to have you do this.” But the centurion says, “I do not deserve this.” He is not even worthy of having Jesus enter his home. He is not even worthy of going directly to Jesus to make this request. Even though he is a man of position and prominence, and although he could assert his righteousness and his rights, he does nothing of the sort. He confesses who he is - unworthy and undeserving.

This is the start and the heart of redeeming faith. Redemption begins when you confess that you are not worthy to receive the blessing you desire. I am reminded of the words of author Calvin Miller, who described the city gates of Jesus’ time. Cities were surrounded by walls, and at night, the gates through those walls would be closed. But a small entryway would be left open for stragglers. If you wanted to get through that entryway, you had to take off any weapons you were carrying, and crawl through the entryway on your knees. You would enter with no way of defending yourself - completely at the mercy of the people on the other side of the entryway.

That is what we see in the words of the centurion, and that is what must come from our hearts and lips, as we live before a good and great God. But we do not tend to think this way. We believe we have the right to ask God for whatever we want, whenever we want it. Pastor Skip Ryan tells the story of receiving a card from a woman that said, “Lord, help me to see my life not in terms of my limitations but in terms of my accomplishments.” That sounds like a nice sentiment, but it is the precise opposite of the faith that leads to redemption. That card encourages us to say to God, “See who I am! See what I have done! See why you need to bless me as I want you to bless me!” Instead, the centurion admits his limitations. He is not worthy to go to Jesus, or to have Jesus come to him.

What about you? What about me? Redemption begins in my heart when I confess who I am. I am a fallen creature, who deserves not the mercy of God, but the judgment of God. If God is going to rescue me from my sin and free me to serve him, it will not happen because I deserve it. I will be rescued and freed, only because of his unforced mercy and undeserved grace to me.

Is that the way you see yourself before God today? I don’t care if you are the child of a good family in the church. I don’t care if you are a longtime church member. I don’t care if you made it to church 90% of the time over the last five years. I don’t care if you have given lots of time, money and energy to the church. I don’t care if you are a deacon. I don’t care if you are an elder. I don’t care if you are a pastor. If your heart says to God, “I am this. I am that. I have done this. I have done that. Because of who I am and what I have done, I deserve to receive your blessing, your favor, your salvation...” - you are far from the kingdom of God. Your faith is in you, and faith in self brings the judgment of God, not the redemption of Jesus.

Have you confessed who you are - unworthy and undeserving? Do you admit that your fall from righteousness means you can never achieve the righteousness that will merit God’s blessing? Or do you still hold on to a shred of hope in yourself and what you have done? You are unworthy. You begin the journey to redemption with a faith that confesses who you are.

I confess who I am. Then the words of the centurion reveal that in faith, **I PROFESS WHO JESUS IS**. When I profess who Jesus is, I profess his place, and I profess his power.

*I PROFESS HIS PLACE*. Look at the centurion’s words again: “Lord...I do not deserve to have you come under my roof...I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.” He calls Jesus “Lord.” He acknowledges Jesus’ greatness. He may not have a perfect grasp of every detail of the gospel message. He may

not be able to recite the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, or the first ten questions of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. But he knows he is dealing with someone who is far greater than he - so great that he did not believe his "roof" should cover this man, or that he should come face-to-face with this man.

What is the place of Jesus? Yes, he occupies a place in our culture. We know the name of Jesus. Most of us respect the name of Jesus. But does he occupy a place of greatness? Do we merely admit him to be special, or do we profess him to be Lord of all? I ask the question of our culture, but I am really asking it of us, as creatures of our culture. We all afford Jesus a certain place. But do we affirm the place he deserves?

In the last days of his life, in exile on a lonely island, the fallen French conqueror and emperor Napoleon pondered Jesus Christ. Here is what he decided: "Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. Everything in him astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and his will confounds me. Between him and whoever else in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. He is truly a being by himself."

I do not just admit the niceness of Jesus. I do not just respect the impact of Jesus. I profess his unfathomable, incomparable greatness, as the Lord of heaven and earth, and as the King of my life and my living. This profession keeps me moving on the path to redemption.

But I profess not only his place. *I PROFESS HIS POWER.* After the centurion declares his own unworthiness and Jesus' true worthiness, he returns to the issue that brought him to Jesus in the first place. He says, "But say the word, and my servant will be healed." Then he describes his own relationship to authority. He has authority over him, and he has authority over people. Here is how we would say what he says: "I say 'Jump,' and the people around me say, 'How high?'" He knows the power of authority, and he sees the power of authority in Jesus. He realizes that Jesus can do what no one else can do - he can bring life in the face of death, with only a word.

The story of faith is the story of professing the power of Jesus. Only he can snatch life from death. Only he has lived without sin. Only he has died for sinners. Only he has risen from the dead. Once again, the centurion may not grasp all of these details yet. But he sees One who is so powerful, and he professes his faith in Jesus to do what only Jesus can do.

No wonder Jesus is amazed. He has not even seen this faith among his people in Israel. He knows the human heart. We want to deny Jesus' place, and we want to diminish our need of Jesus' power. In our pride, we want the highest place and the strongest power.

But the story of the redeemed Christian is the story of utter admission of need (I confess who I am) and utter reliance upon Jesus to meet that need (I profess Jesus' place and Jesus' power). I am not my own Savior. I need Jesus to rescue me from sin and free me to live for God again. This is true when we receive Jesus by faith the first time, and this is true for the rest of our stories, because we do not just come to Jesus by faith. We live for Jesus by faith.

The pastor and scholar B.B. Warfield once wrote, "There is nothing in us or done by us at any stage of our earthly development because of which we are acceptable to God. We must always be accepted for Christ's sake or we cannot ever be accepted at all. This is not true of us only 'when we believe,' it is just as true after we have believed. It will continue to be true as long as we live..."

The apostle Paul said it this way in his letter to the Galatians: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Through the redemption of Jesus, we have a new life by faith, and we live this new life by faith. We profess that Jesus has the place and the power not just to save us, but to rule and reign in us and over us, every day of our lives.

Here is one example of how this works in our stories. This is an issue that we all face, no matter our age in life or stage of life: the issue of uncertainty. In a fallen world, we live with uncertainty. Maybe you are uncertain about your job situation - you may lose what you have, or you may not get what you want. Maybe you are uncertain about your health - or how you will pay for your health care. Maybe you are uncertain about

where you will go to college - or what you will do after college. Maybe you are uncertain about a relationship that has captured your heart. Maybe you are uncertain about whether a loved one will ever profess redeeming faith in Christ. The story of the centurion guides us through times of uncertainty.

We start with the confession of who we are. We realize that we are tempted to be demanding of God - to tell God that we somehow deserve this outcome or that blessing. God, you have to keep me employed at this income level. God, you must heal me. God, you better make my decision clear. God, I must have this person.

But the faith of the centurion re-shapes this part of our story. We admit that we are not worthy of demanding anything from God. Every gift is a gift of his grace. Every blessing is an offer of mercy from his sovereign hand. So we present our requests to God in times of uncertainty, but we humbly confess that we do not have the right to demand or deserve what we desire.

But then we continue with a profession of who he is. He holds the place of power. He is on the throne of the universe, ruling and reigning for the fulfillment of his purposes. By Jesus' mercy, we are God's children, so we can be confident that while we may not receive every specific outcome we desire, we can rest in his goodness to us and care for us. He will do what he will do, and it may not always be easy for us, but he is for us, so we look to him with faith, knowing that we can trust him, come what may. Because of who Jesus is, in his place of Lordship and through his power to redeem, we live by faith.

How is uncertainty part of your story today? You are in the same place as the centurion. Your call is to live by faith - not in yourself, but in the Savior who holds the place of glory and the power of authority. Confess yourself and profess him as you struggle over that relationship. Confess yourself and profess him as you worry about your finances. Confess yourself and profess him as you prepare for that doctor's appointment. Confess yourself and profess him as you enter the murky waters of life change. Like a guy who is as handy as a counterfeit three-dollar bill, you are not able. But he is able. Cry out to him.

Cute kid story! It is the tale of a Sunday School teacher who wanted her class to memorize Psalm 23. The children had a whole month to learn those six verses. A little boy named Rick loved the idea, but he had a hard time memorizing the words. Finally, it was time for the kids to recite Psalm 23 in front of the congregation. Young Ricky stepped to the microphone and said, "The Lord is my Shepherd, and that's all I need to know."

I confess that I need a shepherd. I am a slave to sin and death, and I need a shepherd to rescue me and free me to a new life. I profess that Jesus is that shepherd - the shepherd who holds the highest place, and the shepherd who has the power to rescue and free me. In that confession and in that profession, I receive a redemption that finds expression in all my life - a life I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

The Lord is my shepherd - and that is all I need to know. It is the story of my faith.