

Part 22: How to be Amazing

Tyler Velin | Luke 7:1-10

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What does it take to amaze Jesus?

What do you think Jesus values most about your life? What do you think would please him, cause him to move towards you, to grant you salvation and to give you assurance in life? We live our lives wanting to be seen as worthy by our bosses, our kids, our love interests and our peers. But how does Jesus gauge your worth? What is most impressive about you in the eyes of God himself?

Today we find something remarkable in the gospel of Luke. In fact we stumble into an account of Jesus' ministry which is entirely distinct from anything else. It is unparalleled. As we've been working through Luke's account of the gospel of Jesus we have seen crowds flocking to him who are amazed at his power, who marvel at his words and who are stunned by his miracles.

This would make sense. Jesus is God himself. He is marvelous, he is amazing, he is miraculous!

But what if I told you today that this amazing, miraculous and marvelous Jesus is actually amazed and marvels at someone else. The privilege we have today is encountering Jesus' interaction with the only person in his entire ministry at which Jesus himself marvels. It's one thing for me to be seen as amazing by my kids, it would be quite another to be seen as marvelous by Jesus himself.

So what does it take to amaze Jesus? You might think that on account of our sin there is nothing that would make Jesus marvel in you. But that's not what we see in this story. Or you might think that what is marvelous to Jesus is what is marvelous by worldly standards: power, might, status, and generous works. But by the end of this text we will see that Jesus does find something amazing but it's hidden in postures the world finds foolish. Today we see that Jesus doesn't marvel over mighty works, but instead he marvels over authentic faith.

Our question today is what is the nature of this marvelous faith? And what does it say about our world, our own hearts, our perception of others and the person of Jesus?

Our big picture today is this: **Marvelous faith views everything through the lens of Jesus' value and power.** We are going to see this in two primary ways. First in Luke 7:1-5 we are going to see **A Statement of Worldly Worth** and then in verses 6-10 we are going to see **A Statement of Gospel Worth.**

Having this framework in place I want to first read the whole of our passage and then we can get into picking apart the profound contrasts presented in it. Would you read with me **Luke 7:1-10**?

So here we have the story of a servant being healed and yet this story is less about him and more about his master – the Roman Centurion.

It's in light of this, we encounter our first point this morning: **A Statement of Worldly Worth.**

We actually understand worldly worth in two senses in these few verses. We are going to see **A Challenging of Worldly Worth** and **A Championing of Worldly Worth**.

First we see worldly worth challenged right off the bat. Remember what we spent the last four weeks looking at? Jesus is gathering Israelites to himself, he's appointed 12 apostles of Israelite men, and he has just given his disciples clear marching order of what that discipleship should look like. He's given these men and women a picture of how this New Israel should live in contrast to the world.

We would think that after these events we would read of Jewish apostles applying these truths in profound ways. The culture of this day was strongly ethnocentric. People took pride, found their identity in, and engaged in resistance amongst their diverse national identities.

At this time Israel was occupied by Rome. As we discussed earlier in the series it was Rome who marched into Jerusalem under Pompey and put down the Jewish uprising there with much bloodshed. In the years that followed, Rome allowed puppet Jewish governors to reign, but they kept legions of soldiers in the area as peace keepers, Roman influencers and watchmen.

One of the very disciples Jesus called as an apostle, Simon the Zealot, belonged to a group of political resisters who were called Zealots. They were zealous in their resistance of all thing Rome for the sake of a free and privileged Israel.

Which makes Luke's set up here all the more challenging doesn't it. It was (vs. 1) after Jesus finished saying all these things, in the hearing of all the Jews who gathered, that he went into a Jewish town of Capernaum. But the first person we see loving their enemy, the first person we see giving to someone who was in no social position to give back, was not a Jewish priest, or a called apostle, but a Roman, Gentile, upper-class soldier occupying the very land God promised to his people Israel.

Despite the relationship the Jews had with this specific Centurion, this would have been a challenge to what was expected to be valued. If Jesus was the liberator, why is he helping the occupying nation? More than that, why would he care about the slave of a Centurion of an occupying nation? Because the ministry, the good news of Jesus Christ, is a challenge to the expected places of value and worth in our own lives. Jesus is actively reshaping who is worthy of his ministry and who can follow him.

We've seen this all throughout Luke. The gospel challenges these standards. However, despite what we know to be true we often find ourselves championing these natural places of worth don't we? Interestingly enough, it is the Jews who boast in the perceived worth of the Centurion Soldier. Here we see **A Championing of Worldly Worth**.

Look back at **Luke 7:1-3**.

So here's the problem. The Centurion has a servant who is sick and about to die. But his affection for his servant was so deep, that after hearing about Jesus, he humbled himself and appealed to the authorities of the very people he stood above in terms of power and prestige. He went and asked the elders of the town of Capernaum if they would be willing to go on his behalf to Jesus and to see if he would heal his servant.

Remarkably, the elders go. If there's one thing we know about the Centurion at this point is that he is remarkably a good dude. In fact we see much here that we should seek to emulate in our own world of

political tension and side drawing. He valued his servant so much so that he was willing to humble himself and ask subordinates to represent him. He apparently had a good enough relationship with the Jewish leaders to be able to make this request. The Jewish leaders respected the Centurion enough to make the request. They without being pressured by the Centurion tell Jesus that he loves Israel and that he even built their synagogue for them.

These elders go to Jesus and recount to him the wonders of the Centurion but did you notice how they couched this information: (vs. 4) "He is worthy to have you do this for him."

Why do the Jews think that Jesus should care for this man? Look at all he's done!

But isn't there great irony here? This man might have been the world's most beneficial Centurion, he may have built them their synagogue, but guess whose exorbitantly charged taxes funded it?

There were lots of people who loved Israel, but why is it of importance here? Because the one who loved Israel was in a position of power and prestige. In a place where Jesus is already challenging the places of value through the lens of the gospel, it is the Jews themselves who are boasting in worth based off worldly value – even if that value system was the same system which simultaneously subjected them.

We shouldn't be surprised that someone in the gospel story boasted in their moral standing and great power. But we should be surprised that it was Jewish leaders who thought that would be of stunning value to Jesus! Here we see how easy it is for us to forget to posture of the gospel and fall into the power structures of the world.

But the Jews should know better. Remember what God spoke to Israel when he entered into a covenant with them? **Deuteronomy 7:7-8** and **9:5**. If anyone should know that great deeds by human standards don't indebt God's service it should have been the Jews!

But we see how easy it is, living daily life in this world, to displace what we know to be true about the nature of God's love and supplement it with the value of what the world loves.

But this is what always happens. Israel wanted God to deliver them from Egypt, but as soon as he did that they longed for the power and privilege they had in Egypt – forgetting they were slaves in Egypt! The problem of our hearts isn't that we don't want God, it's that we want God while also still believing that God needs to recognize and use the value, power and worth structures of the world.

It was a generous thing that these elders did. But we cannot move towards Jesus, even in the spirit of generosity, with the standards of worldly value without simultaneously believing those values ourselves.

Brothers and sisters if there's one thing I fear more than anything in the church today is that we hope to influence culture, win culture, and redeem culture with the same power and same rules which simultaneous pollute culture. We will put up with a lot if it means we get to be on the right side of worldly value.

I have always been fascinated by the way in which the church fawns over movie stars, sports stars and celebrity pastors who confess faith in Jesus but whose life, and even message, so blatantly oppose Jesus.

I've been in Christian books stores and seen authors with numerous affairs, political scandals, and suspect ministries championed as the wise men of our day.

Why do we do it? Because we can say: "Look at what they've done! Look at the influence they have! Can you imagine if they could use that power for the gospel?" If I had a nickel every time a disqualified pastor was put back in ministry not because of heartfelt repentance, but because he was deemed worthy of a shot because of his influence, we would have the building fund paid off!

How many of you have seen the T-shirts or bumper stickers, "Stop Plate Tectonics"? Plate tectonics is the movement of the earth's crust which creates springs, geysers, earthquakes and a whole bunch of others things. The joke is that you can't stop it. It's inevitable. To stop plate tectonics would be to do the impossible.

The truth is, we cannot break the longing of our own heart from the worth and value systems of the world, unless there is another value system which interrupts it. We will inevitably play by the same rules which we know ends up enslaving and failing. We live in a world of powers. There's always been an aspect of our world who rightly sees the problem worldly worth and power presents and they try to eliminate any imbalance of powers.

But God is powerful. In his power is safety – the safety and belonging we long for in worldly worth. The solution then is not to get rid of power, but to find the right power as Paul says in **1 Corinthians 2:3-5**.

We begin to see this disruptive value shift in **Luke 7:6-10**.

Isn't this remarkable? Did you notice the crazy inversion here?

Here we have a Centurion who would have been prestigious members of the ranks of military leaders. On top of that Centurions were appointed to their position not only for rampant success as a foot soldier, but also for their moral, ethical and generous disposition. Centurions were the humble heroes of Rome. So much so that these Jewish leaders go to Jesus and say, "He's worthy!"

Only to then have the Centurion say what? "I'm not worthy."

What a transition we see in this text. First, the Centurion sends the Jewish elders to Jesus asking him to come and heal. But at some point, while Jesus is coming, the Centurion has some sort of realization and he sends his friends telling Jesus to not come any further!

What happened here? Values have shifted. And they have shifted in a direct relationship to the Centurions experience and understanding of Jesus. This is where we see our second point today: **A Statement of Gospel Worth**.

When I worked in our campus ministry we had a guest speaker join us for one of our retreats who was a popular hip-hop artist at the time. I, playfully, thought that it would be a good idea to have one of our GCF staffers engage in a rap battle with this artist. It sounded really fun, until the day drew near.

Then I realized that here was this guy who was remarkably gifted, highly influential and who rapped as his vocation and by making this staffer "battle him" who had no business doing so was to potentially make little of and even mock the talents of this artist. It was beneath him.

I think it was this kind of growing realization that the Centurion has in this story. He reached out to Jesus because he heard Jesus was powerful enough to heal. But as that same, healing, powerful Jesus drew near to his house, doubt and uncertainty crept in.

Why? Because he was having a growing encounter with Jesus. It's not that he was any less a Centurion, any less noble or any less powerful. But as Jesus drew nearer and nearer this man of war was turned into a man of weakness.

It is encounters with Jesus that show us who we really are. It's encounters with the value of something of greater that frames our own perception of worth. We'd like to think that for most of us these moments of clarity come on mountain top experiences of worship. But even when the disciples stood on the mountain of transfiguration confusion still clouded their minds.

Instead what we have seen so far in the book of Luke that it is profound and terrifying experiences with our limitations that we encounter the profound and transformative truths about Jesus. It was Peter, overwhelmed and sinking in his fishing boat who cried out to Jesus, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man." Peter's successful catch of fish was diminished by the one who stood in the boat with him.

Here the Centurion, powerful and to be respected by all, but unable to help even his servant, was struck with the gut feeling of inferiority and helplessness when he learned that Jesus was coming to his house.

He is stuck by what one theologian calls a "holy shyness." He makes the case that when one studies God, we also study ourselves by proxy. In seeing the unlimited nature of Jesus we find out just how limited we are. He says, **"As soon as we consider what it means that we futile, finite, sinful creatures should know [God] a holy shyness takes hold of our souls."**

What lead to this holy shyness?

We can tease out three realizations this Centurion had regarding Jesus which changes his perception of his own worth and produced a faith which amazed Jesus.

First, he had an ***Understanding of Jesus as Lord***. This Centurion would have had authority over Jesus as a Jew. He also would have been indoctrinated to view Caesar alone as "dominus et deus," both "Lord and God." But remarkably the first word he uttered as Jesus drew near was a confession of Jesus as Lord. He understood that this Jesus was not like Caesar, nor was he like anyone who he ruled over.

Second, he had an ***Understanding of Jesus as Exceedingly Worthy***. My wife is incredibly gifted in hospitality and part of that gifting includes her desire to have the house prepared for company. Every now and then my communication weaknesses are on display and I let her know almost last minute that I invited someone over, and to her terror she rushes up to get the house worthy for her company.

The Centurion here has this same sense of concern when Jesus approached his house. But his concern was not that his house was unfit, but that he was unfit. He said, "I am not worthy to have you under this roof." It's as if he is saying, this house might be worthy of me, but to be appropriate for me is not the same as being appropriate for you. I myself am not enough, I am not fitting, large enough or significant enough for you to come here. You deserve a better house.

He understood the scandal it would have been for Jesus, King of the Jews, to enter into the house of a Gentile out of compassion and kindness.

Third, he had an ***Understanding of how insufficient he was***. He says in verse 7 that he did not presume to go to Jesus. That word presume is the verbal form of the word "worthy" in verse four. He literally did not consider himself worthy enough to come to Jesus.

I use that word "insufficient" carefully because in contrast to Jesus another word we could use is "insignificant." But this is the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. While in comparison to Jesus we are insignificant, none of us are insignificant before the Lord. We are made in the image of God, in his own likeness. Our greatest significance though is not in the markers of the world but in the potential of being restored to intimacy with the creator of the world. Jesus doesn't move towards insignificant people because the mighty act of creation was not an insignificant act.

But Jesus does move towards insufficient people. We are insufficient to look, behave, act, or deserve anything other than what we are: broken, sinful people living in a broken world. It's one thing for this Centurion to act on behalf of his servant, it's another thing for Jesus to act on behalf of insufficient sinners, but that's what Jesus does in the gospel.

He moves towards people not because of what they are able to provide on their own might, but what the might of grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ might provide itself.

This is what led the Centurion to say, "I understand authority." Centurions were called the backbone of the Roman military. In the military you had the individual soldier, who would be grouped into units of 8-10 men, ten of those units composed one century which was commanded by a centurion. But then the Centurions were also under men.

The Jewish historian Josephus described the structure this way: **"In the morning the soldiers go every one to their centurions, and these centurions to their tribunes, to salute them; with whom all the superior officers go to the general of the whole army, who then gives them of course the watchword and other orders, to be by them carried to all that are under their command."**

This Centurion, though king of his own domain in Capernaum, understood that he too was under authority. He knew the powerful word of authority which called him to a response. This is the fourth point of marvelous faith, an ***Understanding of Jesus' power***.

You see there is no more honest confession of all places of worldly power than, "I too am a man under authority." Every worldly position of power, as influential and seemingly untouchable as it might be is under authority. The mighty dollar is under the authority of inflation and depression. The mightiest and most self-sustainable man in the world shows his subordination the moment he has to put on a rain jacket or turn on the light switch. We can't control, but in fact are controlled by the weather, the sun in the sky, the turning of time. And the Bible tells us what that is in fact called: mercy.

In the book of Matthew, Jesus says it is God who causes the sun to rise on the good and the evil and send rain on the just and the unjust why? So that you might see your Father who is in heaven.

The Centurion here sees that we are all under authority, we are all unworthy. By the standard and measure of the world we might amount to much, but by the standards of Jesus, we amount to little.

But Jesus, the word-speaking, authority-worthy Lord has come to those who are insufficient and in great need. Here's the beauty of it. He's not troubled by our weakness.

In fact, he came for it. That's why Jesus is amazed here. That's why he marvels. The Jews find this man worthy because of his marvelous works, Jesus finds this man worthy because of his marvelous faith!

What does marvelous faith look like? It looks to Jesus. It boasts not in who we are, but it clamors for mercy in light of who Jesus is.

Jesus healed the servant, but that's not even the main point in Luke's text. The point of Luke's text isn't the health of the servant but the heart of the Centurion. He gets it. He has seen worth through the lens of the gospel.

So let me ask you again, are you striving to be justified according to worldly worth or according to Jesus' worth? How might you assess your places of value and worth? I would like to pose two questions for you to consider in closing.

First, does your perception of worldly worth keep you from repenting? Are you unwilling to confess your sins to God or to others because you fear what it will say about you? Are you fearful that coming to grips with your sin harms your perceived value in the world? The gospel speaks hope into that.

Second, does your perception of worldly worth keep you from obeying? There are acts of obedience which look foolish, weak, and pointless by worldly standards. You might have less to post about on Instagram, less toys in your garage than your neighbor, and less notches of success on your resume or your bedpost. But the gospel speaks of the value and comfort of finding worth in submission to Jesus' value structure, not the world's.

Consider these passages: **Jeremiah 9:23-24, Psalm 33:13-17.**

Brothers and sisters, what the world fears as terrifying, Jesus sees as marvelous. Marvelous faith stands opposed to the works of the flesh and the power of the world. Marvelous faith transforms us into servants of one another and lovers of Jesus and it begins not with a boasting in what we've done or who we are but in a humble confession of who Jesus is.

As I've thought of this I can't quite chase out all the places where my value and my worth is rooted in my contributions to the world's power. But I can tell you this, it runs deeper than I knew. But Jesus doesn't need your power. He wants your weaknesses. He wants you to boast in him.

Look at how Paul puts this: **1 Corinthians 1:26-31.**