

## **“Friends and Elders”**

### **Luke 7:1-10**

2022 was a hard year. In fact, it has been hard for three years now, since COVID began. For some of you, it has been very hard, and many things have been affected. At home. At work. Among friends. Many feel isolated. Anxiety and depression are common. There is a lot more stress than ever before. 2022 was a difficult year.

In times like these, it's important to hold on to the gospel. We can't live on our own. We don't have the power. We cannot live except by the power of the cross. We cannot find hope except through the cross. And so in 2023, we are taking a deeper look at the gospel through a sermon series called, “A Better Way: Living in the Gospel.” Each week we look at a portion of the Gospel of Luke to see the contrast between living in the power of the gospel and living in our own strength. We see the contrast between our natural tendencies and a better way to go.

This week, we are going to look at the gospel through the story of the centurion's servant in **Luke 7:1-10**. Hear now the word of the Lord.

**7 When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup>There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. <sup>3</sup>The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. <sup>4</sup>When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, <sup>5</sup> because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” <sup>6</sup>So Jesus went with them. 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. <sup>7</sup>That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup>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.” <sup>9</sup>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.” <sup>10</sup>Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.**

Let's pray.

“Loving heavenly Father, help us to receive your word today. Open our hearts and minds, and help us to see the God of grace more and more clearly. Guide us to be able to see his blessings. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.”

## 1. The Elders

Jesus entered Capernaum, where there was a certain centurion. This man was not a Jew, but he built a synagogue, a place of worship, for the Jews. He probably did a lot of other good things for the Jews as well. He cared about them. He was a righteous man. A good man. He lived a good life.

One day, the centurion's servant got sick and was to the point of death. Not long before, Jesus healed a man in the synagogue that the centurion built. And so, knowing about this, the centurion sent elders of the Jews to Jesus. The elders knew the good things that the centurion had done, and so they went as his representative. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, and said, **"This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."**

Since the centurion is a "deserving" man, it is fitting to have his servant healed, the elders said. It is fitting that God should bless him. The elders are acting out of a legalistic, moralistic mindset. We receive God's blessings for a reason. We receive blessings because we have done something to deserve it. If we don't deserve it, we don't get God's blessings.

When Jesus heard the plea of the elders, he began to walk toward the centurion's house.

## 2. The Friends

While on his way, the centurion sent a second group of people to Jesus. This time, his friends, and their message is the exact opposite.

**"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."**

These words are in stark contrast to what the elders said. What the friends are essentially saying is, "I have nothing to offer you. I do not deserve your grace."

This centurion is a Gentile. According to Jewish law, if Jesus entered a Gentile's house, he would be defiled. Besides that, many Jews understandably did not like the idea of being under Roman rule. Many Jews thought of the Roman soldiers as oppressors.

The centurion believed he "did not deserve" to have Jesus come to him. He relied on God's mercy alone in this request. Then the centurion says,

**“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.”**

It's interesting that the centurion does not say he is a man with authority but that he is a man under authority. He recognized that his authority came from above. He showed great humility in spite of his great power. He asked for the grace of Jesus from a lowly position, as a man who is poor in spirit.

No matter how much we pray, or give money, or do good deeds, we don't deserve grace. We can't deserve grace. There is nothing we have to offer before God.

This is the reason, Jesus praised the faith of the centurion. **“I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.”**

### **3. The Suffering Servant**

So, the Jewish elders thought that the centurion was “deserving.” The friends, in contrast, said that the centurion was “not deserving.” But there is a third important character in the story. The suffering servant.

He was sick, but he was healed. He was dying, but he lived. If the servant had died, there were surely many who could have taken his place. He had an extremely low position. But he was cared for by the elders, by the friends, by the centurion, and by Jesus himself. He received many blessings.

Can you imagine what he felt like? He was sick. He knew he was going to die soon. He felt alone in the dark. He felt abandoned and beyond hope. No one said anything the servant deserving anything. But it was in that powerless state that he received grace. That his life was restored. That he was healed from illness.

But, you know, there's another suffering servant in the story. Philippians 2:6-8,

**“[Christ] who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!”**

Jesus became a servant to save his people. Isaiah 53:3-5 also speaks about the suffering servant.

**“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”**

Jesus became a servant for us. Jesus, whose name is above every name, became nothing so that the servant of the centurion, a man of no name, could be healed. Jesus was stricken and afflicted, so that the servant of the centurion could be healed. The Creator of the universe died so that the slave of the centurion, and we as well, could live. Jesus was forsaken and abandoned on the cross, so that the servant of the centurion servant, and us as well, could be cherished and saved and brought in as part of the family. Jesus served God and us, alone on the cross, as he called out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The servant of the centurion points to the true and greater servant.

The servant of the centurion, and all of us, were alone and dying, completely undeserving of grace. Yet, we have been given grace and have been given new life.

## **2. The Friends**

Like the centurion, we lack the strength. We are poor. But we can boldly ask for mercy because Jesus gives grace to those who do not deserve it. As he said in the very first words of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:3, **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

## **1. The Elders**

The elders made a grave error. The one who was deserving was not the centurion. It was the one who was right before them. Jesus loved the nation of Israel and built the ultimate “temple,” a place for them to meet with and worship God. Jesus was the truly righteous one, the perfect one, the one who is worthy. Revelation 5:9, **“[Christ,] worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”**

In Greek, this word translated “worthy” and the word translated “deserving” in the Gospel of Luke is the very same word. Jesus is worthy. He is deserving. We who are unworthy go to Jesus, who is worthy, and can cry out, “Kyrie eleison” (“Lord, have mercy!”). All the pain and wounds of 2022 can be healed. We can face this new year of 2023.

As we head into 2023, we don't have to be so anxious or depressed. We know that we are not good enough. We know that we are broken. We know that we cannot live up to the

standards of others or the standards that we create for ourselves. But that's okay, because there's grace.

We can let go of the burdens we carry from 2022 and take hold of the gospel. In 2023, God is working among us. God's grace is being shared with us. This is the good news of the gospel.

We are not deserving, but we receive grace. We can live "a better way." We can live in the gospel. We can go to Jesus.

Let's pray.

"Gracious God, please heal us. We are sick and dying, but you died in our place. You were forsaken and cast out in our place. You have made us your precious servants. You are the man of sorrows, the suffering servant. But by your grace and mercy, we can live.

Lord, have mercy on us. We humbly come to you. We know we are not qualified, and yet we will receive your blessings. Thank you, Lord Jesus. We pray in the precious name of the Lord. Amen."