

The Miracle We All Need (Luke 7:1-17 August 2, 2009)



In five years from now – there will be very few of my sermons anyone will remember. In fact one week later – most of us struggle to remember the previous week's sermon.

But I suspect that those of you who were here last week – will always remember that sermon.

Not because it was a great sermon – far from it – but it sticks in the mind because the sermon was interrupted in a very memorable way.

I did a lot of thinking about that this week. There were lessons to learn. One of them was to think about giving the bigger picture.

Let me put last week in context. It was the final message on Jesus' Sermon on the Plain.

The Sermon on the Plain and the Sermon on the Mount are incredibly hard words to read, to hear, to preach on. They just cut you to the core of your being and no one measures up to that standard.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount – unless your righteousness *exceeds* that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

You have to be *more* godly than these men who were incredibly fastidious in obeying the law.

Jesus describes what the lives of His disciples must look like – loving our enemies – giving to all – refusing to judge.

Finally, He asks:

Is your fruit good?

Is your foundation good?

If not – do not call me Lord.

No one can read through that sermon and not feel unworthy, inadequate, a failure.

They are hard words to hear – as we found out last week – and I am sure we all felt that way.

But one of the difficulties in preaching is that when you read Luke – you don't stop at the end of the Sermon on the Plain – you keep going into chapter 7. Chapter 7 is the hope and light that puts the Sermon on the Plain into perspective.

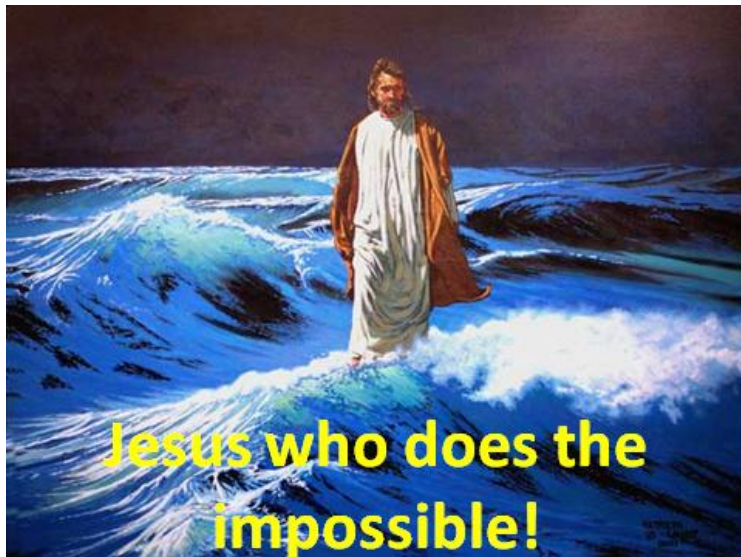
The Sermon on the Plain is supposed to make you feel sinful, and inadequate and wretched.

The point is for us to realise that in our own strength – our righteousness *cannot* exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

We are meant to get to the end of Jesus' Sermon and ask – who is adequate for these things?

In a very real sense, we are meant to feel just like that lady last week did.

But, chapter 6 ends and chapter 7 begins. And the picture we get is of:



Jesus who does the impossible!

It is humanly impossible to live up to the standards of the Sermon on the Plain. It is meant to drive us toward Jesus who can transform us in ways we can't do ourselves.

Impossible is not a word associated with Jesus.

The chapter begins with two incredible miracles.

In all the world – who can cure the sick? – no one but Jesus.

In all the world – who can raise the dead? – no one but Jesus.

Jesus does the impossible. What does this mean?

After these miracles, the disciples of John the Baptist are sent to inquire if Jesus is truly the Messiah – and Jesus responds:

Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them.

The miracles declare that Jesus is the sent One – the Messiah. But Jesus did not come simply to perform miracles. These miracles merely display His power to perform **the** great miracle.

They lead us to the episode at the home of Simon the Pharisee where Jesus tells the sinful woman – Your sins are forgiven – your faith has saved you.

Here is the point. Curing the sick is impossible. Raising the dead is impossible. But Jesus can do it.

Having your sins forgiven – is humanly impossible – but Jesus can do it.

In the Sermon on the Mount – Jesus said – you must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. You can't do that.

Living the life Jesus pictured in the Sermon on the Plain – is impossible – but Jesus can enable us to do it. In this life we can never live it perfectly – but with His power we can grow more godly.

The Sermon on the Plain is tough. Just reading it makes us feel like failures. Who is adequate for such things? The answer comes straight after the Sermon on the Mount – while we are not adequate and never can be – Jesus can make us adequate!

In our own strength – we cannot save ourselves – that is why Jesus had to come – and He can do the impossible.

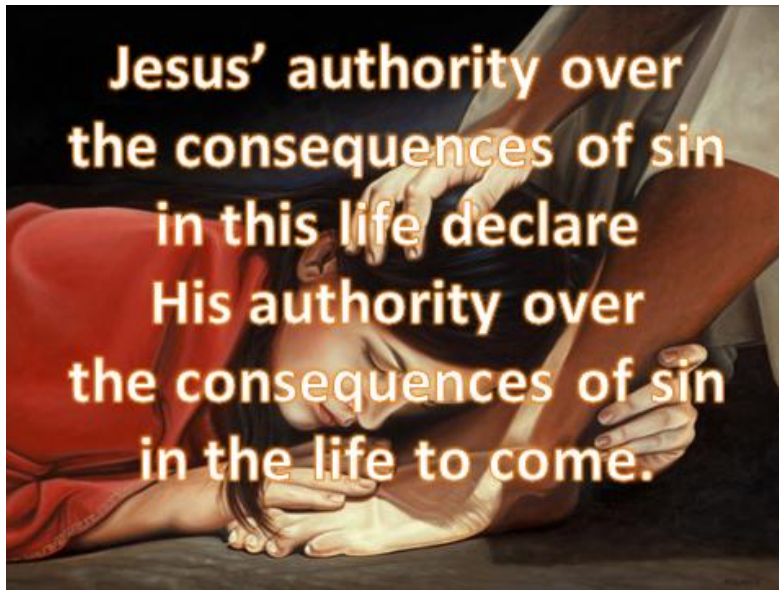
So look again at chapter 7.

This chapter begin with two miracles – healing a desperately sick servant and the raising of a dead son.

Two miracles that are humanly impossible. A man beyond the hope of human doctors – healed by a word. A man beyond all hope – dead – about to be buried – and raised by a touch.

We are then told what these miracles mean – they identify Jesus as Messiah.

And finally in the episode at Simon's house – it all comes together.



Jesus' authority over the consequences of sin in this life declare His authority over the consequences of sin in the life to come.

In this life we see the consequences of sin and the fall – disease – death – natural disasters. We can see these. And we can see miracles involving these areas.

Throughout the Gospels – Jesus heals the blind, raises the dead, calms storms, casts out demons.

And Jesus keeps saying – I do this so that you might know I have authority in the realm you can't see. I have authority to transform the inner man and to forgive sin.

The problem is that it is easy to say – you are the Messiah – you have the keys to heaven.

In the years before Jesus – there were many false Messiahs. The more notable ones that most Jews alive in Jesus' day would know were:

Simon, a former slave of Herod the Great who rebelled and declared himself the long awaited Messiah.

Athronges proclaimed himself Messiah in around 3 BC.

Judas of Galilee, the son of Hezekiah, a member of the Zealots led a bloody revolt against Rome census in 6 AD and proclaimed himself the Messiah.

Messiahs came and went.

And in the century after Jesus there was a very long list of others who claimed to be Messiah.

In fact there will be false Messiahs till the end of the age. There are a number of so-called Messiahs alive today. Go to Youtube and you can find them and their claims. So claim to be able to forgive sin.

That is an easy claim to make.

I have no doubt that many viewed Jesus of Nazareth as just another claimant to be Messiah – who would fade away with the rest of the false Messiahs.

But what separated Jesus from every other so-called Messiah were His credentials. A miraculous birth. A forerunner. Fulfilment of prophecy. A voice from heaven. And in particular His miracles.

It is one thing to say that you have the power to change men from the inside out and make them holy. It is entirely another thing to say – in order that you may know the Son of Man has the power to forgive sins – I will raise the dead.

As a doctor, I have seen more than my share of dead bodies.

I have seen dead bodies in casualty, in the operating theatre, in the morgue. I have even had to do an autopsy on a dead person in a small town out west.

But the first dead bodies I saw were in the anatomy lab – a room filled with dead bodies. You look at these bodies and know – once they were living, breathing, vital men and women. Now they are dead. No imaginable power could give them life. It is beyond comprehension.

I could not imagine a miracle of greater power than life coming into a body that is dead.

To a sceptic a resurrection would be a miracle of incredible power.

To a believer a resurrection would be a miracle of incredible power.

So, that we might know Jesus can give us the power to live holy lives – salt and light lives – and so we might know Jesus can forgive our sins – grant eternal life – He performed miracles of power.

This morning we will look at these two miracles of power.

Turn with me to Luke 7. Luke 7:1-6:

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 the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. 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.

Almost everything about these verses seems wrong.

A centurion asking Jesus for help. Jewish elders helping a Roman centurion. Jewish elders seeking out Jesus. Nothing seems right.

A centurion was a Roman commander of 100 men – an important and wealthy man. His servant falls sick and he sends to Jesus for help.

The equivalent might be an American Army captain serving in Iraq – who sends for an Iraqi mystic when one of his men falls seriously ill. Not at all what is expected.

Almost as unexpected is the fact that the elders support the case of the centurion. Usually the Romans were seen as oppressors – the enemy. The Jewish leaders did not help them.

The equivalent might be local imams in Iraq supporting the case of the American Army captain.

And the final unexpected twist is that the elders seek help from Jesus. Usually the leaders of Israel had been earnestly opposed Jesus.

What seems to have happened here is this. Over his time in Israel, this centurion had become a God-fearer. He had been exposed to Judaism and had become a lover of Israel and the God of Israel. The Spirit of God had taken the blinders off his eyes and he had come to see the truth.

He had then become a supporter of Israel. Out of his own pocket he had paid for the synagogue in Capernaum to be built – this would have been an extraordinary gift – a sign of his desire to show love for the nation.

This centurion was their patron – so it explains why the local elders supported his appeal to Jesus. It doesn't mean they had faith in Jesus – just that they wanted to be seen to be supporting their patron.

But it is the next verses that tell us *why* the centurion sought help from Jesus. Verses 6-8:

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.”

It seems that the centurion had heard the stories about Jesus and had concluded He was the Messiah and He could heal.

Just think about the faith of this man.

Clearly the centurion believes that Jesus can heal His servant. The fact that He felt unworthy to have Jesus come under His roof probably indicates his faith that Jesus is the Messiah. He knew he was a sinner and unworthy – but he also knew Jesus had the authority to heal his servant.

He knew that Jesus did not even have to enter his house – He merely had to say – he healed.

This is great faith.

Verses 9-10:

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 who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

Jesus has been travelling throughout Judea and Galilee – teaching and healing.

Wherever He goes, Jesus keeps hearing – show us a miracle. And when He does perform miracles – the result is not faith. Some just want more miracles. Some want to kill Him. Some just walk away.

Jesus performs the miracles of Messiah – and Israel does not have faith.

Yet, here is a Gentile – we don’t know that this man ever saw a miracle of Jesus. We are told he just heard about Jesus. The Spirit of God gave him faith that Jesus was the Messiah, that Jesus could heal his servant and that Jesus could heal at a distance.

This is supernatural faith. You can’t analyse Jesus and get this faith. You can’t get this faith through science and logic. This is God-given faith. This is the faith that saves!

It is this faith that believes that Jesus can take out our hearts of sin and give us hearts like His.

It is faith like this that trusts that Jesus can bear our sins on the cross.

It is faith like this that believes that Jesus will raise us from the dead on the last day.

This centurion had a servant who was dying. Most likely the best physicians money could buy had tried to help this man. Humanly speaking he was done for. But this God-given faith believed that Jesus can do the impossible.

And Jesus did do the impossible – he healed this servant.

He did what no one else could do. He spoke the word of power and the man was healed.

This leads us to a **second** – and even greater miracle of power.

Luke 7:11-12:

Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her.

This man was not just sick – he was dead.

Occasionally the gravely ill recover. The body might overcome the infection. At times cancer goes into remission.

But death is a barrier too far. Death is the final enemy. We all understand the finality of death.

So, anyone who can overcome death can overcome anything.

Jesus travelled to Nain and there he met a funeral crowd.

There was a widow who had one son. He was her only means of support. No husband – no other children.

There was a coffin and a crowd. All funerals had mourners – in fact the tradition was to hire professional mourners. You wept because death was the end.

But the saddest heart there was his mother.

I have not had a child die. I can only imagine the pain. I think losing a child – and especially an only child would be close to the greatest pain this world has to offer. It would shatter me.

It shattered this mother.

But, verse 13:

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.”

Jesus is moved with great compassion and tells this mother not to weep. He has decided to help her. Verses 14-15:

Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

This man was dead. Beyond all hope. But not beyond the power of Jesus.

Jesus reached out and touched the bier. Normally that would defile Jesus and make Him unclean. But here the power of Jesus turns the unclean clean. Jesus raised this boy from the dead.

How would you respond if you were at a funeral and a loved one rose to life? You had accepted the finality of their passing and all you had left was enormous grief. And then in the midst of the grief – the power of God raises them to life.

It is so incredible – that even though I believe in God with all my heart – I can't even imagine a miracle of such power.

Do you know that there are many who do claim to have had loved ones come back to life by the power of God.

I did a search this week looking at the claims that Jesus raises people from the dead today.

I couldn't believe how many there were.

One outrageous church caught my attention.

I very nearly played you a video clip of their revival meetings in Florida which was broadcast live on the internet. The evangelist claimed to be raising people from the dead all over the world and asked people who were watching on the internet to email in testimonies of friends and loved ones being raised from the dead.

Offsiders kept running up with emails. Hallelujah. A boy raised from the dead here – a dead baby there – a mother risen here.

In a few minutes they were up to 23 people raised from the dead. Doctors had certified them dead. They were dead for hours and days. And then prayer cloths were laid on them and they rose again.

Even one authentic miracle would catch the attention of the whole world.

Not surprisingly when ABC TV in the US looked into the claims they found not one story of healing or raising could be verified.

But, I didn't need that to know this was not of God. Why? The reaction. As each email was read out – there was no fear of God – no holy awe – the people hollered and whooped and rolled on the floor.

If there had seen a real resurrection – the response would be quite different.

Verses 16-17:

Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

When these men and women saw the man who was dead breathe and sit up and rise from his coffin – they were petrified.

These men and women knew they had been in the presence of the awesome unimaginable power of God and fear gripped their hearts.

When you read this account – you are meant to think back to the story of Elijah raising the dead son of the widow of Zarephath. The events and even many of the words are very similar.

Listen to the end of this account – 1 Kings 17:19-24:

And Elijah said to her, "Give me your son." And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. And he cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?" Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, "O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again." And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, "See, your son lives." And the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth."

This woman knew Elijah was a prophet of God.

In the same way the people of Nain cried – A great prophet has arisen among us – God has visited His people.

This is a miracle of such power – it can only be from God.

It is hard to know exactly who they believed Jesus was. But they should have listened to what Jesus said about Himself. He was the Messiah – sent to raise their souls from the dead.

His miracles showed who He was.

Think about this miracle. This boy was dead. His brain was dead. His heart was dead. His cells decaying. Nothing could help him.

But Jesus gave Him life. For all our medical knowledge – we don't even know what life is – what gives us a soul.

Jesus gave this dead lad life. That is power. That kind of power can do anything.

What is the point of these events? Years later the Apostle Paul was writing to the Ephesians and in a remarkable passage – he showed the point of these miracles.

Look with me at Ephesians 1:16-19. Here Paul says:

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.

Hear that. Paul prays that believers might **know** what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe.

Sometimes we don't appreciate the power available to the saints.

He then tells us the magnitude of the power available to us.

FIRST, IT IS THE POWER THAT RAISED CHRIST FROM THE DEAD PHYSICALLY – VERSES 19-23 – the working of His great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

We have poured countless trillions into medical research. We cannot halt the march toward death. We cannot stop death. And once someone is dead – we can do nothing about it.

Jesus was dead. The Roman soldiers certified Him dead. Three days in the tomb – dead.

But God raised Him from the dead.

This is the power of God.

This remains the great miracle.

Millionaires leave their fortunes to cryogenically freeze their bodies in the forlorn hope that someday mankind will gather the knowledge to be able to give life to their dead bodies – cure what killed them and undo the aging process.

But no doctor can even imagine how that could be ever be possible.

But Jesus did not just imagine it – He rose from the dead. He appeared to hundreds of witnesses and then ascended to heaven. This is sheer unimaginable power.

But this merely leads to Paul's real point.

THAT SAME POWER IS AVAILABLE TO RAISE US FROM THE DEAD SPIRITUALLY – Ephesians 2:1-10.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly

places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We were spiritually dead. We were without hope.

Corpses cannot help themselves. They can't even twitch. They can't earn merit.

In the same way, sin had us dead and buried. We were headed for hell and unable to do anything.

In fact there is more hope that a cryogenically frozen body can have life than that our souls can find eternal life.

But God – Lyle delights in saying these are the two most wonderful words in Scripture – and if not the greatest – they have to be close to the greatest.

But God – who could do something – *because* He is rich in mercy – **did** do something.

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead physically – is given to raise us from the dead spiritually.

And He empowered us to live holy – we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Jesus healed the centurion's slave. He raised the widow's son. Then He said to John's disciples – see these miracles they shout to the world as to who I am – the Messiah.

And they declare that I can forgive sins. I can transform men. I can raise the spiritually dead.

No one here can love their enemies – but Jesus can give you that love.

No one here can wash away their sin – but the blood of Jesus can.

No one here can get to heaven – but Jesus can take us.

Does Jesus perform miracles today? – absolutely.

Does He still heal the sick? If it suits His purposes – but it seems rare.

Does He still raise the dead? Possibly – if it suits His purposes. I know of no verified account.

These miracles are not regular and ongoing because they would distract us from the real miracle – the miracle every one of us needs.

Does He still heal the spiritually dead? Yes! Every single day.

Jesus performed these miracles – so that we might ask Him for the miracle we all need – the saving of our souls.

Just as He healed the centurion's servant with a word – so Jesus – seated at the right hand of the Father can heal your soul with a word. He has the authority.

If you don't know Jesus – if you aren't sure you have eternal life – if you need His touch – ask Him – He delights to save all who come to Him.

Is there something in your life that is seemingly impossible? Are you struggling with sin? Struggling to live holy? Do you despair over that relative who seems beyond salvation? Do you wonder if you will see the power of God in the lives of your children?

Then know this. The power that heals the sick. The power that raises the dead. The power that raised Jesus from the dead – this power is at work today. Healing souls – strengthening us to live holy – answering the prayer of faith.

We need to be like the centurion – ask Jesus and trust He will answer the call of faith.

After the lady left the service last week – Dave visited her. I hope she will feel able to let me visit one day. Because I want to tell her that we are inadequate and we are sinful and we can't live perfectly and we all fail – but that is why Jesus came.

And in Him is the power to live holy and find eternal life – it is not in us. But praise God Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.