

What Amazes God

Luke 7:1-10

David Sunday

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Our amazing God is revealed to us in His Word. The amazing glory of Jesus Christ is on display in Luke 7:1-10. Let us worship our Savior as we read:

¹ After he [Jesus] 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.

Praise God for His living Word. Amen.

Singer and Bible teacher Michael Card calls Luke, "the Gospel of amazement." Luke likes to tell us of people who are amazed at what God is doing in Jesus Christ. At the beginning of this Gospel, Zechariah and Elizabeth are amazed. In chapter two, those who hear the shepherd's news are amazed at the birth of Jesus. Mary and Joseph are amazed as they ponder what God is doing in the gift of Mary's Son. When Jesus is still a child, He goes to the temple and discusses the Word of God with the elders of the people and they are amazed at His wisdom. When Jesus is an adult and enters into a synagogue in Nazareth, He speaks and teaches with authority and the people are amazed. Peter and his partners are amazed at the glory of Jesus when they catch a miraculous boatload of fish. Everyone is amazed at what God is doing in Jesus because truly, He is more than amazing.

However, in this passage we find something unusual. In this case, it is Jesus Who is amazed and marvels. There are only two times in the Gospels where we are told Jesus is amazed at something. The first is in Mark 6:6 where Jesus is ministering in Nazareth and is amazed at the peoples' unbelief. He

couldn't do any more mighty works there because of their unbelief. He marvels at how unbelieving their hearts are. But in Luke 7:9, Jesus marvels at a man's faith. The Greek word used for 'marvel' is '*thaumazo*' meaning 'I am amazed.' He is amazed to see the Centurion's faith.

When Jesus looks at me, I wonder if He finds anything amazing about my faith. Or when He looks at me, does He marvel at my unbelief? When Jesus walks among our congregation, is there anything about our faith that amazes Him? Or is He amazed but sorrowful at evidences of unbelief in our midst?

We sang the hymn, Begone, Unbelief by John Newton:

Begone Unbelief
My Savior is near.
And for my relief
Will surely appear;
By prayer let me wrestle,
And He will perform;
With Christ in the vessel,
I smile at the storm.

That has been a big prayer of my life in the last decade. I have grieved, been convicted and ashamed when the Lord through the Holy Spirit has revealed unbelief in my life. I have been praying for about a decade, "Lord, increase my faith." So I am grateful for passages like this because they show us the kind of faith that amazes Jesus.

There are basically two elements to this kind of faith. Jesus is amazed when:

1. We know we deserve nothing from Him.
2. Yet we confidently look to Him for grace and mercy in our time of need.

This is the kind of faith that amazes Jesus. Before we unpack that together, let us go to the Lord and ask for His help in this time of preaching His Word.

Lord Jesus, You are more than amazing. The things You did, the way You spoke and Your work on our behalf amazes us. You forgot all our sins and remembered all Your promises. This is more than amazing to us! Lord, we confess the thought of You being amazed at anything in us seems foreign. We fear that too often You are amazed at our lack of trust and belief in You. We pray this Pentecost Sunday for such an outpouring of Your Spirit and such a reviving work in our faith as a church that You would truly create, cultivate and find in New Covenant Bible Church a kind of faith that amazes You. Not so we can be seen as amazing, but that You may be seen in our community through us as a Savior Who is more than amazing. Lord Jesus, increase our faith for the glory of Your name. Amen.

There are two elements to the kind of faith that amazes Jesus.

Knowing We Deserve Nothing from Him

It is so rare for people to really feel they are not worthy and deserve nothing from God. To put this story in context, Jesus had just taught the Sermon on the Mount. After He finished His teaching, “...he entered Capernaum” (verse one). There He found a man who seemed to be a worthy example of Jesus’ teaching—someone who had loved his enemies and been very generous. As a Centurion, he was the commander of 100 soldiers—a Gentile who worked for the Roman government. He had a servant who was very dear to him. This was unusual because in that culture when a servant became ill, he was typically sent home to die and was quickly replaced. This was a centurion who exhibited kindness and mercy—a man who loved his servant. This centurion had heard about Jesus, so he sent some of the Jewish elders to ask Jesus to come and heal the servant. It was also unusual for Jewish elders to associate with a Gentile commander from the Roman army.

When Jesus was on His way to the centurion’s house and the centurion heard (presumably) Jesus was coming, He sent another delegation with an updated message. Here is where we get a revealing insight into the centurion’s character. We see that this man knew he deserved nothing from Jesus.

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. Therefore I did not presume to come to you” (Luke 7:6-7).

This is an exhibition of rare, unusual humility. On Pentecost Sunday, we need to remember one of the main evidences of the Holy Spirit working in our lives is humility. This is something that can only be done by God. By nature we are proud, lofty, think highly of ourselves and think we deserve the universe. It is the Holy Spirit’s work to help us see ourselves as we truly are, convict us of our sins and convince us that we in ourselves don’t deserve anything from God, abase us and make us low before God. The Holy Spirit does demolition work on the pride of our hearts. It is an act of His love because He knows that—in the end—it is only those who humble themselves who will be accepted. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

The Holy Spirit has evidently been working in this centurion’s heart because he was so humble he felt he was unworthy to have Jesus come under his roof. This is amazing for a number of reasons:

1. He was a man of great power in a position of authority, used to telling other people what to do. He was a leader in an army that has conquered and defeated people. People with that much power are usually not humble.
2. He was very competent—recognized as being capable of administration and thus put in this position of authority.

3. He was a wealthy man, so much so that he could fund the building of the synagogue in his community. Those who have a lot of wealth are normally tempted by pride. It takes a great cultivation of the Spirit's work in our lives to continually humble us.
4. He was held in high esteem by others. It was very unusual for Jewish elders to advocate for a Gentile soldier. Listen to what they say about this man as they earnestly plead to Jesus for him: "*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*" (verses 4-5).

So we have a potent combination of forces that would seem to indicate this man would be very proud. He has power, competence, wealth and the esteem of others. But he is the type of guy who says, "Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise. I'm not puffed up by these things." He is not the type of guy who believes his own press or becomes intoxicated by the praise of others. He doesn't say, "I am worthy. I am what others think I am."

You know what it is like to start thinking in your heart, "I've done quite a lot for God. I love this church and have given a lot of money and time. God owes me something. I deserve Him doing something for me." People say to you, "Wow, I'm really impressed with what you've done with your life. You have an amazing faith." Or as someone said to my wife, "You must have a direct line to God." You start to think to yourself, "Maybe I am a little bit holier than others and do deserve some special treatment. Maybe I am worthy."

Not so for the centurion. He didn't trust in his own philanthropy or believe the good things others said about him. In fact, in this story we see that as Jesus gets closer to his house, the centurion becomes more and more uncomfortable at the thought of having Someone as holy and worthy as Jesus coming under his roof. So he sends the message, "I am not worthy, Lord, to have You enter my house."

What do you think God owes You? What do you think you deserve from Him? It is easy to answer that question theologically or to say piously, "I deserve nothing but hell from God." It is a lot harder to live your life free from a sense of entitlement, as if you truly believe that you are not worthy.

C.S. Lewis compared the human heart to rats in a cellar. "The flesh, our sinful nature, is like a dark cellar infested with rats. If we were a building, we would be condemned." Usually you don't know there are rats in the cellar unless you go in very quickly. If you do a lot of banging on your way down, they scurry and hide. But the suddenness of your entry is not what creates the rats. It only prevents them from hiding. They were there all along. Friends, the true state of our hearts is revealed when we are suddenly shaken and provoked. What we do when we are taken off guard—before we have time to put on a disguise—is the best evidence of the kind of people we truly are. What comes out of your heart when you are suddenly shaken or provoked by trouble? Do you think, "I deserve better than this." Does your faith in God fluctuate like a mid-western thermometer in the spring? One day you are hot, the next cold, depending on how you feel God is treating you that day.

True faith begins here: “I’m not worthy, Lord. I deserve nothing from You. But the rats in my cellar poison me with self-pity, resentment, sullenness, a sense of disenfranchisement, a sense that I deserve better than this.” I wonder, are you secretly nursing any grudges against God for not giving you what you think you deserve? Do you feel you are worthy of better treatment, more attention, closer care or concern than God has shown you? If so, learn about faith from a Roman centurion. It begins with these words: “I’m not worthy, Lord.”

But thank God it doesn’t end there. That is only the first element of this man’s amazing faith. When we realize we are not worthy of anything from God and in us dwells no good thing; when we lay low before God, we also look up and realize that in Christ we are dearer to Him than the apple of His eye and He delights to do us good.

When We look to God with Joyful Confidence, He is Willing to Show Grace & Mercy in Our Time of Need

Let’s talk about the joyful confidence of faith and our ability to trust that God is able and willing to give us anything we truly need. He will not give us anything we want, but He is absolutely willing to give us the grace and mercy we really need. The centurion had this kind of faith in Jesus.

‘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’
(Luke 7:7-8).

“Just say the word, Jesus, and my servant will be healed.”

Imagine you are a soldier going into enemy territory with perils on every side and bombs on the way. You receive a message on your radio from your commanding officer that says, “Make an immediate turn to the right.” You don’t hesitate or question, rather you follow your commanding officer’s instructions exactly. You are under authority. How vital it is to know when you are under authority that you must do unhesitatingly what you are commanded to do.

Here is a centurion who is a man under authority himself with 100 people under his authority. He has never met Jesus but has heard about Him and believes this about Him: Disease and death are under His authority. The centurion has only heard eyewitness testimony about Jesus, not seen Him. However, he has learned enough about Jesus to know Jesus was Someone he could trust. He knew enough about authority to know that when Jesus commands disease to flee, it flees. “*But say the word, and let my servant be healed.*” Not, “I’ve done the best I could do, Lord. Now I could use a little help from above.” Not, “I’ve been so very generous to Your cause, Lord. Now would You please come through for me?”

Not, “I’m worthy, Lord!” Rather, “I’m not worthy to have You come under my roof. But just say the word. Your Word gives life to the dead, joy to the weary, comfort to the grieving and healing to the sick. Just say the word and Your servant will be healed.”

Luke 7:10 records an amazing miracle. Jesus never saw that centurion until heaven; never saw his servant, touched him or even looked at him from a distance. “*And when those who had been sent returned to the house, [look at what they found] they found the servant well.*” He was healed from a distance because Jesus just said the word.

Friends, the One we worship is the One Who spoke the universe into existence when there was nothing. He said, “Let light come out of darkness” and there was light. He flung the planets into space and created this amazing world that blossoms with new life in springtime. That is our Savior Jesus.

He speaks, and, listening to His voice,
New life the dead receive,
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
The humble poor believe.

(From O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing by Charles Wesley, 1739)

Jesus’ Word gives life to the dead today. This centurion gives us a great example of how we must rest our faith on the eyewitness testimony of Holy Scripture because none of us has seen Jesus personally. Remember Luke is writing to Theophilus, “*that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught [about Jesus]*” (Luke 1:4). The centurion never saw Jesus but heard the eyewitness testimony about Him and rested his faith on Jesus Christ.

True faith does not depend on having all your questions answered. There are a thousand questions you may have. The first question you need to resolve is this: Is Jesus the answer to the right questions?

- Is Jesus Christ Lord?
- Does He have power over sin, death and hell?
- Is He able to save you from the most desperate perils that threaten to destroy you?

That is what you need to resolve first. You and I have a problem, the evidence of which is all around us and constantly within us. Our problem is sin. Sin dissolves our relationships and brings sorrow, disease and death into our world. Its presence is undeniable—to deny its reality is to suppress truth. I say to you, don’t wait until you get a thousand questions answered. Boil them down to the most pressing issue of life—the one question you need to resolve: Is there anyone in the universe who has the authority to deal with sin, disease, death and the devil?

Jesus claimed to have that authority and demonstrated this by laying down His life as a bloody sacrifice for our sins and taking it up again by rising from the dead. He is Lord of all. He has all authority in heaven and on earth and every knee will bow and tongue confess His Lordship (Romans 14:11). He is

Lord and can exercise His authority even from a distance. Jesus does not have to be in the same room with you to forgive your sins and set you right with God, to begin the massive work of renovation and healing that will ultimately flower in full beauty in the new creation—the new heavens and new earth. Today He is present for those who believe His Word to begin and continue that work.

Jesus looks at the centurion and marvels at his faith because he did not see Jesus, yet he believed. Jesus says to us today, “Blessed are those who have not seen Me but know Who I am, hear what I am able to do, humbly ask Me to meet their need and trust that through Me they will receive what they truly need.” Jesus is amazed at that kind of faith.

Listen. Unbelief is commonplace, blasé, boring and normal. Do you think you are special because you don’t believe? Everyone doesn’t believe. What’s amazing is faith! It’s a gift from God. God is here by His Holy Spirit to give you faith. That is where you enter into a life that is more than amazing. It is what we celebrate with the waters of baptism. The God Who creates faith in dead hearts of sin and unbelief—the God Who gives new life to the dead. Jesus said, “*Not even in Israel have I found such a faith*” (Luke 7:9). Ironically, in the Gospel of Luke, the one who amazes Jesus the most is a Roman—a Gentile centurion—a commander of armies and a warrior. It is amazing where God creates true faith in the world!

I wonder what happens when the healing does not come? What happens when your prayers seem to go unanswered and God doesn’t give you the thing for which you were asking? Is there a faith that is even more amazing than the centurion’s? I think there is. Luke 22:42 records a Man in such agony that He is sweating great drops of blood. He falls on the ground before His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane and cries out in prayer, “*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.*” This faith is the victory that overcame the world. It is a faith that did not shrink from suffering but surrendered to death itself, believing that death would not have the final word and waiting for the One Who had authority over death to just say the word and raise His Servant from the grave. This faith is more than amazing. It is the faith of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Elizabeth Elliot’s first husband was murdered by the savage people they were trying to reach for Christ. Despite this, she went back to share the gospel with them and the church was planted there. She married again and her second husband died of cancer. She once wrote:

The experiences of my life are not such that I could infer from them that God is good, gracious and merciful, necessarily. To have had one husband murdered and another disintegrate body, soul and spirit through cancer is not what you would call a proof of the love of God. In fact, there are many times when it looked like just the opposite. My belief in the love of God is not by inference or instinct. It is by faith.

(From "Denial, Discipline and Devotion" in *Tenth: An Evangelical Quarterly*, July 1977)

If you are trusting what God has revealed in His Word and demonstrated through His Son, Jesus Christ, even in the face of suffering and not receiving what you would hope to receive, this faith is amazing. It is more than amazing. This is the faith of our Savior—the Author and Perfector of our faith—and He is willing and eager to cultivate this faith in us when we cling tenaciously to His Word.

Let's pray together.

Father, we come to You with many unanswered questions and unfulfilled desires and aspirations. We come to You with brokenness in our lives, with a burden for people in whom we would long to see You work. It appears nothing is happening with sicknesses, diseases and troubles that at times threaten to overwhelm us. We pray You would lift our eyes above our circumstances to the One Who is more than amazing, Who teaches us that those who hope in You, wait upon Your Word and cling to Your Word will not be put to shame. Father, I pray You would grant to us, cultivate and deepen within us the kind of faith Your Son Jesus displayed in the Garden of Gethsemane—willing to surrender all to You and trusting You to raise Him from the grave.

Father, we thank You for the work of creating faith in the hearts of people that we will celebrate in the waters to baptism. Thank You for this miracle of grace and faith in our lives, uniting all who trust in Christ to the risen Savior so that we find our life, hope and joy in Him. We pray You would strengthen, sustain and deepen our faith as we see this living illustration of Your power in the baptism of our brother and sister in Christ. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.

Thankfully, the faith we confess is not man's creation or something man has dreamed up. It has been given to us, revealed in Holy Scripture and confessed by God's people from generation to generation. It is summarized for us in the Apostle's Creed, used by the early church as a training tool for baptismal candidates. We are going to confess our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As we see God's grace and power illustrated in the sacrament of baptism, may we who have been united to Christ by faith rejoice in what God has done for us and renew our vows to follow Jesus all the days of our lives. May our trust in the power of the resurrection and the new life we have in Jesus be strengthened in this time of worship. Let's confess our faith together:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended into Hades.
On the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father Almighty,
from there he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic (universal) church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

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