

## 'Be Healed' Luke 7:1-17

By Pippa Page

**Luke ch 6**, which we have been looking at in the last few weeks, is sometimes referred to as the sermon on the plain. In it we find the Beatitudes, teaching about loving our enemies, warnings about judging other people and, finally, the importance of basing our lives on Jesus, and living out His teaching, with the parable of the wise and foolish builders last week. Verse 1 of ch 7 says "When Jesus had finished saying all these things to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. So its as if Jesus has given them the sermon, and now He's going to show them how to put it into practice.

The next thing that happens is that some Jewish Elders from the Synagogue come to Jesus with a message asking Him to go and heal the Centurion's servant. We're told that the Centurion had heard of Jesus, which is not surprising because Jesus had healed quite a lot of people in and around Capernaum, including healings in the Synagogue and at Peter's house.

Centurions were part of the Roman army. They were traditionally in charge of 100 Roman soldiers, so we might expect them to be regarded as the enemy by the leading Jews.

But this Centurion, the elders said, loved the Jewish nation and had built the Synagogue for them. He also cared about his servant who was about to die, which was not altogether normal. Owners often threw out and abandoned servants or slaves who were no longer of any use to them.

So Jesus went with them. As He got near to the house, the Centurion he sent some more messengers to tell Him not to come to the house, which would make Jesus, as a Jew, unclean, It's interesting that the Centurion describes himself as a man **under** authority, with soldiers under him who do what he says and servants who obey him, rather than a man **of** authority or **with** authority. It shows humility. It also shows that he realised that Jesus's power came from a higher authority – from His Father God.

Jesus was amazed at the Centurion's faith which Jesus said was greater than any faith He had found in Israel. We're only told twice in the NT that Jesus was amazed - the other time was at Nazareth when Jesus was amazed by the peoples' lack of faith.

The thing that caught Jesus' attention the most, was the way he recognized Jesus' power to heal.

The Centurion said “**Just say the word and my servant will be well**” And when the messengers got back, the servant was completely healed.

We're often told by preachers that people need to have **faith** in order to be healed, but with **this** story and the one we had a few weeks ago, of the four friends who let the paralysed man down through the roof to get him close to Jesus, it seems as if other people can have faith on the person's behalf.

Then Jesus went on to Nain, which is about a days walk away from Capernaum. Nain is 5 or 6 miles SE of Nazareth. As Jesus and his disciples, and the crowd following, came into the village, a funeral procession was coming out. Even the poorest of people had professional mourners to wail and play musical instruments. I've always thought that this is a terrible idea, all that noise just when you want to be quiet, but Tom Wright points out in his commentary that the professionals make plenty of noise so that the friends and relatives can cry their hearts out without the embarrassment of making a scene all by themselves. He thinks that this is a much kinder way of doing things than the clinical detached solemnity of a modern Western funeral! I hadn't thought of that before, maybe he's right!

Anyway, as the funeral procession came out of the village, Jesus was filled with compassion for the mother, who was already widowed and had now lost her only son. Women did not join the workforce in that culture, and before the era of social services and pension funds, she would now be dependent on the charity of family members and the community to survive.

We don't know how long ago she had lost her husband, but now she had lost all means of support and the family line had ended. She was at risk.

Jesus said “don't cry”. Then He shocked everybody by touching the bier. Nobody, except the pall bearers, would ever do that, because it would make them unclean. But Jesus didn't seem to mind that sort of thing! Then he spoke to the young man, and told him to get up. The young man sat up, and began to talk – so he was definitely alive! And Jesus gave him back to his mother, to the amazement of everyone present.

I'm sure that as Luke was recording this event, he must have had in mind the story of Elisha and the Shunamite woman whose son died, and God brought back to life when Elisha prayed for him, in 2 Kings ch 4. Shunem was just down the road from Nain. (There was also a similar story of Elijah praying for a widow's son who had died, in Zarephath, near Sidon, and God brought him to life too). I reckon that all the people in Nain knew about these events, especially the one down the road, and that's why they said "**a great prophet has come among us**" and "**God has come to help His people**" - meaning "this is the time we've been waiting for!"

So who had faith in this story? Nobody even asked Jesus to do anything. His compassion caused Him to act, and the power of God acting through Him allowed the young man to be brought back to life.

Jesus did sometimes ask people to take a step of faith – **to speak out** what they wanted Him to do, or to **admit** to having touched the edge of His cloak, or to **get up**, or **stretch out their hand**, or **go and see the High Priest**; but in this case, He doesn't ask the widow for anything. His heart goes out to her and He intervenes. And it spoke a clear message to the people of that town – God is on the move!

So what about us, here in Weston in 2023? Should we expect to see miracles of healing, or any other miracles for that matter?

Well, lets look at the Bible.

Proverbs 12.11 says "**Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense.**"

Prov 10.4-5 says

**Lazy hands make for poverty,  
but diligent hands bring wealth.**

**He who gathers crops in summer is a prudent son,  
but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.**

The Bible assumes, again and again that, for most of the time, things happen regularly, following what we call the laws of science, or the laws of nature. So we shouldn't expect to sit on our backsides waiting for God to do a miracle and provide food for us, we need to take responsibility to make most normal things happen!

I don't suppose that that comes as much of a shock to anybody here this morning!!

When Jesus was on earth, He sometimes overruled the laws of nature – but it often had consequences. After the feeding of the 5000, we're told in John 6.26 that people came to Him just wanting free food. After healing miracles, loads of people crowded round wanting to see miracles, but not listening to what He was trying to say. He often told people not to tell anyone about their healing, but they did, and that made it more difficult for Him to move around because the Jewish Leaders were trying to find ways to arrest Him and the people wanted to see more miracles. When He cast out demons, He had to be quick to tell them to keep quiet because otherwise they told everybody who He was, and that put Him at risk of being forced to be the sort of Messiah that the people wanted and expected, rather than the sort of Messiah that God wanted.

We need to remember that we live in a fallen world. God gave us free will, but when Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 3, and chose to doubt what God had said and to disobey Him, suffering and sickness entered the world.

In John 16: 33 Jesus said **“In this world you will have trouble”**

In Rom. 8: 17 it says **“We share His suffering in order that we may share His glory”**

In John 9, Jesus is asked about the man born blind, and the cause of his blindness. In v.3 Jesus says **“this happened in order that the work of God might be displayed in his life”**

We live in a world where sickness and suffering are all around us. We are very blessed to have a Health Service full of dedicated staff who do their best to support and heal us when we get ill. Should **we, as Christians**, expect to be **free** of sickness and suffering? I don't think that there is evidence in the Bible to say that we should not expect to experience it. But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't ask God for healing, either for ourselves or our loved ones.

However, God is God. If He always did what I asked Him to, he would be like a servant to me. That is very definitely the wrong way round.

In Isaiah 55.8 It says **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways declares the Lord”**

And God reserves the right to say “no”.

Sometimes people are not healed, no matter how hard we pray. We all know people, and probably most of us ourselves, have prayed fervently for a loved one and believed that God would heal them, and yet they have still died, and sometimes our faith has taken a knock!

God’s desire for us is that we will “Dwell in His courts”. If He answers our prayers quickly, will we just run off again. If we have to keep praying, does that mean we spend more time in His presence? Is that what He wants?

I’ve been re-reading Pete Greig’s book “God on Mute” this week. I strongly recommend it to anyone who is struggling with unanswered prayer. Pete is one of the leaders of the 24-7 Prayer Initiative which is now a world-wide organisation.

years ago, just after giving birth to their 2<sup>nd</sup> child, his wife Samantha developed a brain tumour, the size of an orange, which, fortunately was operable, although her life was in the balance for a time, but it has left her with epilepsy, in need of on-going strong medication.

Prayer for her healing has gone up from all over the world, but she still has not been healed.

Pete says in the book **“I have come to believe that if Sammy had been spared her brain tumour and we’d never been forced to face the possibility of her early death, we would thereby have missed out on God’s best for our lives.**

**God’s best has somehow been drawn from the worst pain we could ever have imagined. I continue to hate Sammy’s illness, but I love Sammy more because of it. God has shown Himself to be bigger than that fierce tumour. Bigger than a misfiring brain, too. Bigger than nights of fear. Bigger than my inability to comprehend.”**

Does this mean that we shouldn’t ask for healing? Or that we won’t get an answer even if we do? I don’t think so.

Jesus sent out the 12 disciples in Luke ch 9 and later the 72 in Luke ch 10 with instructions to “**Preach the Kingdom of God and heal the sick**” and lots of people were healed.

And Jesus **did** do **healing** and other miracles, lots of them, and miracles do still happen today. There are people in our church who have been healed from various illnesses, some by the power of God through the help of the health service and some directly by the power of God.

Some years ago, John Arnot from the Church on the Runway, in Toronto came here to lead a healing service. My husband Robert was up in the gallery on the sound desk. John Arnot said that he thought that there was someone with knee pain that needed healing. Robert had a knee that kept clicking out of joint and was very painful, especially if he tried kneeling on it. He was intending to go and see a doctor about it.

Robert didn't go forward for prayer, he said to himself “If God wants to heal me He can come up here!” The next thing he knew, he was face down on the buttons and sliders with a feeling of intense heat in his knee.

John Arnot said that the knee would not be healed instantly, but that over the next 2 weeks it would improve, and the pain would go, and that's exactly what happened.

1 John 5: 14-15 says “**This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.**”

Jesus said in John 16:23-24 “**I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.**”

In John 15:7 Jesus says “**If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.**”

So, this suggests that we should indeed pray for healing, and anything else we need. Praying according to His will, and in the name of Jesus. We may need to be persistent in prayer.

I have heard people, including myself, pray prayers along the lines of “Lord, I might perhaps like you to do this, but I know that you might not want to , or it might be difficult” then we go on our way, not sure whether we have asked for anything or not!

Jesus said to His Father in Mark 14.36 **“Everything is possible for you”**

Today's reading suggests that we should have no hesitation in asking. God, through Jesus, invented the laws of nature, and he can bend them if He wants to.