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Luke

Chapter 7 - An Unbelievable Faith

Formed in the Realm of Hopelessness (vs. 11-17)

Luke 7:11-17: Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, "Do not weep." And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!" This report concerning Him went out all over Judea and in all the surrounding district.

In many respects, you go through the Book of Luke, and you find that this is the common man's gospel. As we began, the title that we've given it is "Good News for the Unlikely". It's those that perceive themselves to be outsiders. Luke himself being probably a Syrian, which means that he was not a Jew, which would take him outside the realm. What's wonderful about the book is he begins to demonstrate to us those that we never would have thought would have been in the forefront of faith. The question is, where does faith come from? How does one get faith? I mean, it must come from the ivory towers, right? I mean, where the great theologians exist, this is where faith is birthed, and Scripture reminds us that nothing can be further from the truth. James chapter 2 tells us, "Do you not know that it's the poor of this world that are rich in faith?" And when it's talking about poor, it's not just talking about poverty of finances, but it's talking about those that have been humbled to the degree in which they cry out. In the case of this particular chapter, we have a centurion who is a Roman, an

outsider, not a Jew, that calls upon the Christ, Jesus Himself. As the passage tells us that he had been hearing about these things, which is also telling us that he was a listener, that he had been mulling over these things in his mind, that there's somebody here that's powerful; that he himself had been attached and had attached himself to the Jewish synagogue in which he had actually financed the building of that synagogue, as we read earlier. So, we have this centurion, really an outsider, that has attached himself to the people of God, and now he hears of this Jesus at a time that is very important. He begins to stir this thought of this One that is doing great miracles. He is healing people. He is touching people, and they are healed. So, he sends a group of men out, religious leaders. I mean, if in fact you're going to send somebody out, maybe best if you're dealing with religion to send religious leaders out. And so, he does. Of course, they meet with Christ, and they go, "There's this Centurion. He's a really good guy. I mean, he financed our synagogue." I mean, good people are good people because they do something for us, right? That's what makes them good. So, anyway, they began to stir and

began to cry unto Jesus, and then we realized Jesus starts walking that way. But it really wasn't until the centurion realized it's not the great that will convince Him. So, he sends his friends to Jesus. And as he sends his friends to Jesus, they come, and they beckon, and they call Jesus, "Lord". They come in a state of humility. The centurion is broken already because it's his servant slave that is close to him, that is near the point of death. So, because his servant friend is near the point of death that he loved very dearly, now he is drawn to believe something beyond the normal, and God is calling him.

All the way through the Book of Luke, we have these pictures of individuals that we would think, "Wow, that's a really impossible situation." And he just fills the pages with the impossible. I mean, Luke starts off with Elizabeth, right? I mean, she's so old, there's just no way she can have a child at this point. She's been childless up to this point, and now she's probably in her 70s, 80s. She's not going to have a child, and yet the angel of the Lord says, "You're going to have a child." And the child becomes John the Baptist.

You have an indigent girl, a poor girl, by the name of Mary. She's a virgin. She's not going to have any children right now. "Oh yes, you are." Only Luke will record this, by the way. Only Luke records the whole virgin passage of Mary. And what he's telling us is that God is a God of impossible. God works through those that you would perceive to be the most unlikely to receive. It's those that would perceive themselves as being the most unlikely because of their weakness. Of course, Paul would say, "When I am weak, He is strong, for God's strength is made perfect in my weakness." We just don't think that way. We think in terms of stacking the deck for the odds to be in our favor. Nevertheless, Luke will change that thought, and it'll be people like Simeon, it'll be people like Anna that God will pull out. And He said these people have been waiting all their lives, and they probably thought all their lives had possibly been for nothing. And God reveals Himself to them, to shepherds in the field that you never would have thought would be the first ones to come. And it would be a story of the prodigal son that would be listed in this wonderful Gospel of Luke that no other Gospels lists the story of the prodigal son. And you would

think it would be impossible for this young man to be forgiven by his father, and yet he is forgiven by his father, embraced by his father. It will only be in the Gospel of Luke that Luke will mention the Samaritans. And the last thing that you would ever think that a Samaritan could ever be designated as good. And yet, this will be his name from now on. Of the 10 lepers that are cured, as Luke records only, it'll only be 1 leper that comes back and gives thanks, and he'll be a Samaritan.

All the way through this wonderful gospel, we have these wonderful pictures of God doing this. A woman out of the streets comes up to Jesus, washes His feet with her tears, and Jesus says, "I tell you, this woman is more forgiven than you, religious leader." You'll have Zacchaeus, which only Luke will record, Zacchaeus, that wee little man that hid up in the sycamore tree, that was a tax collector of the highest order. And by virtue of Jesus coming to his house, he repents, and he comes to the Lord.

All the way through, even to the end, you have this wonderful picture of the man on the cross, and only Luke will record the salvation of the man on the cross. Only

Luke will record this particular incident of the healing of this young man that had passed away. We come right into a funeral procession, and in the funeral procession, it's as if we have a serendipitous moment. in which here Jesus is now entering into the city of Nain, and they're coming out of the city of Nain. So now, I mean, you've got to meet Him because you have to go through the gate. We're going through the gate. So, I can just imagine. And we know that there are a lot of people with Jesus. The passage actually says that not only were the disciples with Jesus, but a great multitude was with Jesus, and they're following Him. What would cause Jesus to walk to the city of Nain? What would cause Him to leave the area of Capernaum where He was? And this passage actually wants to tie in the two events. How do we know that? Well, if you pick up with me in Luke 7, and if you drop on down, you read in verse 11,

(Luke 7:11) “Soon afterwards...”

Soon after what? Soon after the incident that had just happened. That is to say, the healing of the servant. As the centurion says, “All You have to do is say the word.

You don't even have to show up, because I believe in Your authority.” And we go, “Wow, I've never seen such faith.” Well, actually, Jesus goes, “Wow, I've never seen such faith.” It says He marveled. Doesn't it say that within the passage? He actually marveled over this.

(Luke 7:9) “... “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.””

Where does faith come from? How do people believe? Why is it some people really believe, and other people seem to be on the outskirts? What is this thing called faith? How is it cultivated? Where does it come from? And what we're going to see is that faith is always in the realm of sorrow, pain, hurt, where people are in great need. This is why Scripture says the poor are rich in faith. It was at the time in which the centurion and his great servant was about to die. And it was at that particular time that he goes, “I've got to try this. I've got to try this.” He takes that leap of faith to such a degree that he lets Jesus call the shots. He's used to order. He's used to being in the realm of those that give orders and those that take orders. So, he goes, “If You're Lord, You decide.” I mean,

you don't walk up to a higher-ranked officer and tell him what to do. If you ask for help, he then helps you the way he wants to. So, he turns to Jesus and he goes, "You're Who You say You are, 'Lord,' You do whatever You want to do." And that's faith, right? Faith isn't us coming to God and going, "You need to do what I think You need to do." That wouldn't be faith because you don't regard Him as Lord. You don't regard Him as Creator. You don't regard Him as Who He is. So, faith is actually believing that you come to Him and it's in His hands and He'll do right. "Will not the God of all the earth do right?" as Abraham will say.

So, as we come into this, what we begin to see is that particular incident, that is to say the healing of this one, is now attached to this incident, though He will walk quite some distance down towards the area of Nazareth, where actually He was raised. And if, in fact, you were to be on the hill of Nain, where that particular city is, there's a valley in between, and you could actually see Nazareth from a distance. So, that's the particular region in which He finds Himself. What's strange is that the city of Nain is

mentioned no other place in all of Scripture. Just right here. It's the only time it's mentioned, ever. Which you would think, "Wow, now that's real obscure." I mean, that's a real hidden thing. I mean, who would ever think that He would go to Nain, right? I mean, it's sort of like, "Would anything good come out of Nazareth," right? So, what you have is this interesting picture of, once again, Luke bringing us to this particular incident in this place that we would have never invented or thought of in our heads. But here He is. And it seems as if, in some ways, the passage is relating that this wasn't accidental or serendipitous at all. This was a resolve in which God was coming for a particular purpose. And because we hear of the city of Nain in no other reference, it had to be just for this particular purpose. This young man had died; his mother was a widow. That was her only son, and all hope was gone.

When we read through Scripture and we look at faith, we realize that faith is not necessarily something that I can initiate by myself, that it literally is initiated by God through the process of things that He's doing in our lives.

In the case of the centurion, what we have is that faith is actually brought about and introduced by God through, I would say, an impossible, unimaginable event. Something happens in your life, and in this case, a loved one gets ready to die. I mean, if you've had somebody die close to you, it doesn't seem real. It literally seems surreal. You're going, "This is not happening. Death couldn't be real. It couldn't be this final." And it begins to stir in your hearts. Ecclesiastes says in Chapter 3 that God has placed eternity in the hearts of all men. Think about that. So, it doesn't matter if you're an atheist or agnostic or gnostic or whatever you want to call yourself. Inside your heart, there is a sense of there's got to be something more. "There's got to be something more. This can't be it," because God has placed that in your heart. And I have seen and I have heard atheists cry out, "Oh God!" And I'm going, where did that come from? But there's something inside their heart that will believe in those moments in which the impossible and the unimaginable begins to happen. And it begins to stir in their hearts to such a degree that they cry out beyond what they can do,

beyond what man can do, to a greater power. They know that there's a greater power. It is interesting that the centurion goes, "I've heard about this Jesus." What anchored him in Him? It was the sickness of a loved one that was almost near death.

This passage that we're going to be looking at is about a funeral, the funeral procession, and the death has already happened. And in the context of the centurion, we realize that what began to stir the faith in his life was the sense that "I need somebody that is stronger than me, I need someone that is more powerful than me, somebody that's more in control, someone that has greater authority, somebody that has authority over death." There are so many passages that relate to us the goodness of God and reminds us that God is able to save.

Isaiah 59, we oftentimes quote, in verse 1, reads this way, (Isaiah 59:1) "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short That it cannot save..."

Lamentations 3 will take this a step further, in verse 32, and says this,

(Lamentations 3:32) “For if He causes grief,
Then He will have compassion
According to His abundant lovingkindness.”

I anchor in verses like that and am reminded that certainly God is a God that is approachable and one that you can turn to.

In the context of a widow that is in need in this passage, there's a passage in Psalm 68, it reads this way in verse 5, (Psalm 68:5) “A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows...”

(Psalm 68:6) “God makes a home for the lonely...”

I like that phrase, don't you? “God makes a home for the lonely.”

Scripture tells us that a broken and contrite heart God will not despise. Another way of putting it is that God will not think lightly about somebody that's broken. He takes it to heart and He's concerned about that. Well, that's the beginning of faith, those broken hearts, those difficult times. This is why James will say in James 1, “You need to consider it all joy when you encounter various trials,

because it's the testing of faith that produces endurance, and it's that endurance that has this perfect result that you're perfect, complete, lacking in nothing.” It's that which produces faith in you. It's those trials that cause you to make your faith real, because really up to that point, you're kind of in the realm of, “Yeah, I kind of believe God exists,” and “Give us this day our daily bread” type thing. But when you're really up against it and the impossible and unimaginable begins to happen, you need somebody that's stronger than anything or anyone that you've ever known, and you begin to turn upward. Faith begins to get stirred in the hearts of people, and it is that great faith.

So, Scripture goes on to say,

(Psalm 68:19) “Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden,

The God who is our salvation.

(Psalm 68:20) God is to us a God of deliverances...”

That's who God is to us.

“... And to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death.”

Isn't that a great passage? How could I escape this thing called death? I mean, once again, death seems so unreal. It is clearly impossible, clearly unimaginable. Our minds want to dodge this thing called death. We find ourselves in a very interesting scenario, and the reason why it's so interesting is that we know little of this town, we know nothing of the dead young man; we actually know very little, if anything, of his widowed mother, and yet, they become the center of Christ's focus. Once again, it's kind of very much Luke as we come to the passage.

Luke 7:11 reads this way,

(Luke 7:11) “Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain...”

It comes from the word “*nā'â*” in the Hebrew, which is found in Psalm 23, “green pastures”. And what we're going to find is the shepherd leading into green pastures. Looking forward to that, aren't you?

“Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd.”

You're not going to miss Him. I know a lot of times people are saying, “Am I going to miss God?” You're not going to miss God.

Verse 12 reads this way,

(Luke 7:12) “Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out...”

So, once again, He's going in; they're coming out of the gate. So, it's kind of like a funnel. Now, things start getting crunched and you've got to bump into people. If you're trying to avoid somebody, you're not going to avoid them if you're coming out with a... And it seems as if the amount of people that are coming out are almost as much as the amount of people going in.

“Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her.”

A crowd going in, crowd going out. There you have it. This is what is called in the Hebrew, a “*laveya*”. “*Laveya*” is a funeral procession that happens where the one that is

dead is carried on like a bed of sorts, covered up, as it were, and the families and the friends begin to wail, and the mourners begin to display their respect by marching with the dead, because as the tradition is, they're marching him to the eternal. And as they march him, their hope is to give him, as well as the family, some sense of comfort that they are with him. And so, the marching symbol itself is an act of comfort by those comforters that are coming. And apparently, according to the passage, you see that there were a lot of friends. So, the individual is highly respected, that is to say, at least the widow was, and there are many there that were with her.

What's happening within this passage? Well, what's happening is that we're leaving the city, and now, we're going outside the city. Have you ever read Hebrews 13, where it comes towards the end and God says, "Come outside the city. This is where you're called." That we are those that are outside the city. We're not part of the world. Our hope is not in the world. Our hope is not in the things of the world, and it's a very interesting picture because the boy is dead. So, we have literally left all

possible hope by leaving the city as well, because now we're burying, and all hope is gone. But this is where faith begins. See, because there are times in our life where something begins to happen, it stirs in our life; we see somebody that is sick, ill, hurting, our hearts are stirred, "Save them." And faith will be stirred in that, because we'll look to something greater. But this is an after the fact issue. The boy is now dead. He's a young man. Scripture will actually tell us that Jesus will call out, "Young man." So, we know he's a young man, probably in his teens.

My granddaughter married a young man that she had met in high school, and the way that she met him was that his father had passed away. So, he became the man of the house. And my granddaughter saw that he was really caring for his mother. So, he took up the ranks and he began to watch over her, take care of her, and she could see that this was a person that had great compassion. He was still working through his bitterness in all of this, but she could tell that this was an individual of character.

What you see in this setting is that you have a mother that has already lost her husband, but now she has to deal with her only son. And in this particular setting, in this particular time, if you didn't have a man in the house, you would have very few rights and probably very little possession. So, all hope is gone.

By the way, if you look with me in Luke 18, it kind of adds an understanding to this. Luke 18, we have the story of the widow praying to the judge. Do you remember? So, maybe you can understand why she's so persistent. Because she has no hope if the judge doesn't grant her.

The way that it reads in Luke 18 is,

(Luke 18:1) “Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,

(Luke 18:2) saying, “In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man.

(Luke 18:3) “There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Give me legal protection from my opponent.’

(Luke 18:4) “For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man,

(Luke 18:5) yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’”

(Luke 18:6) And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge said;”

If an unrighteous judge would do this, would not the God of righteousness hear your prayer? It's a great picture because it shows the contrast.

And as we come to this, we realize that she was in dire straits and there was no hope. What's also to be noted within the passage is that we have nowhere in the text that she was seeking Jesus out. Nowhere in the passage. She's not looking for Jesus. The boy's dead. Things are over. She has no hope. In the passing, it's not the widow that recognized, “Hey, that's Jesus.” Nobody calls out. Nobody does anything. This is unilateral saving in the text. It's all Jesus. He just comes up, He says, “Stop weeping.” Look at the passage with me.

(Luke 7:12) “Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her.

(Luke 7:13) When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion...”

It's actually a psychosomatic event because it's actually talking about the kidneys, the bowels are stirred, which is telling us that here Jesus in this human flesh was so touched that His body was sympathizing. So, why is Scripture wanting to tell us that? Well, it's wanting to tell us that because it's wanting to tell us the depth of His concern, that Jesus wasn't just passing by going, “Yeah, it's really too bad that this woman has lost her son.” He's feeling it just as she is.

So, the passage says that the Lord saw her, and took note of her. He felt compassion, and the word actually is where we get our word “spleen” within the text.

“... He felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.””

Actually, what the Bible's telling us is that He's concerned that we sorrow. Hebrews would tell us that we don't have a High Priest that's not touched by our sorrows. He actually is concerned for us, and He doesn't want us to cry anymore. Isaiah actually quotes that the day will come He will wipe away every tear. Revelation will quote that two times, and the last in Revelation 21, where the day will come where we'll be in heaven and He'll wipe away every tear from our eyes. Do you have somebody that loves you? That doesn't want you to cry anymore? That's Jesus, and He's the one that met her. He's the One that initiated the meeting. It says because He saw her, He felt compassion. He didn't want her to weep anymore.

(Luke 7:14) “And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise!””

Well, just like a teenager, the first thing he does is he starts talking.

(Luke 7:15) “The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother.”

She was probably a little bit further down the procession. And you could just imagine. I mean, it's like, where did this come from? Scripture's telling us that faith comes oftentimes through those moments of desperation, and we cry unto the Lord, and He hears us. We say, "You're the only One that can help me" and He hears us, and He works on our behalf. But there are times that all hope is gone in our lives. But God is not done with His work. No, no, He will stir faith. How will He stir faith? He'll work in your life in such a way that you never expected it. You weren't looking for it. It was an impossible moment. It was an unimaginable moment. But you knew that it was God. That was only God that could do that. He does it not because you earned it, not because you asked for it, but because He knew that if He demonstrated himself, you would respond, and respond the people did.

The passage goes on and reads this way in the text, (Luke 7:16) "Fear gripped them all, and they began glorifying God..."

What a strange way to put that, because what was it that caused the fear? The marvelous compassion of God and

His grace stirred fear, a sense of awe in their lives. God would be concerned for them, that God would even meet them as they were going out the gate, that God would so orchestrate this that He would show His great power to somebody that, to this day, we don't know their names. There's an obscure family living in this obscure city, in a place where nobody would have ever thought Jesus to have showed up. Never again would we ever hear this town. But this day, with this woman, He had seen the heart, and He knew that He'd done a great work in her life to such a degree that not only her, but those that are close to her, would begin to call on God.

“... they began glorifying God, saying, “A great prophet has arisen among us!”...”

As Elijah and Elisha had done such a great miracle as well. But then they came to this conclusion, “No, God has visited us. This was a God thing. This was greater than... This was the care of God.” Which, by the way, the word “visited” makes reference to, that “God has come to give care to me.” And of course, it only makes sense in the town of Nain in which we come into green pastures. God

restores the soul. God does the great work that nobody else could have ever imagined. And the passage says that not only fear gripped and not only had these people proclaimed this, but the report concerning Him went out all over Judea, which is far away, at least another 60, 70 miles away to the south, and that God spread His word through this one act.

It is to be noted that there is another incident in which, actually a couple other incidences, but one in particular just jumps off the pages of the Gospel of John. It's found in John 11 of Lazarus, who was raised from the dead. The question arises, at least with me, "Luke, why not record Lazarus?" Lazarus was in the tomb. It was right before Jesus goes to the cross. He's been dead four days. His body is decomposing. People are saying that it's stinking now, and what a miraculous thing. I mean, He calls him out of the tomb. He comes out of the tomb. He starts tearing his clothes because he's wrapped up as they would do, and you go, "Wow, that's an amazing passage." And it really speaks to us all because, of course, you have Mary and Martha and they're approaching Jesus, and

they're saying, "Had you come a little earlier, this man could have been saved. This is somebody You loved. You love us. You love our family. Why wouldn't You come earlier?" And Jesus goes, "You don't believe Me? I tell you, even if he dies, he will live again. Do you believe?" What a wonderful story. Luke will not record it. Luke will record Nain. Why? Because the incident with Lazarus was in Judea, next to Jerusalem. Bethany was right next to Jerusalem. It was just outside the gate in Jerusalem. But that's where the "in" people lived. Luke is going to show us where the "out" people live. Because the tendency would be, "Yeah, sure, if you're around Jerusalem, yeah, you're going to have the attention of God. Yeah, if you're in this place, you're going to have the attention of God" and God goes, "Okay, let Me show you, I'm doing this work all over the place." And isn't it wonderful that this work actually became a message for those in Judea? God can work miracles. Nothing's too hard for Him. His arm is not so short that it cannot save. It will be the difficult times in your life that you'll realize this. Sometimes just sitting here and even hearing me speak. The Spirit can use the word of God, but there will be something in your life

that will make it all real, and it's at that moment where faith is born. You're going to tell yourself, "I need something more than what man can develop. I've got to walk out of the city. I've got to come into the field where Jesus is." And He'll do a work for you.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we come before You today and we give You praise, but more than that, we give You our attention. You've put eternity in our hearts. There's something in our hearts that caused us to say there has to be something more. This is not it. This is not the end. We look upon Your Son, He dies for our sins, but He is raised from the dead. He ever makes intercession for us in heaven, and we can hear His voice as plain as John 14, "I go and prepare a place for you, that where I am, there you can be forever with Me." We have wonderful things to look forward to. We have a wonderful God that loves us, who wouldn't spare His Son, but would freely give Him for us. We believe this. We believe this with all of our hearts. It's been Your grace to place us in circumstances

and situations in our life where we feel like our hands are tied, where we feel like it's impossible to find any facsimile of hope, and that's where we hear Your voice, "What about Me?" Faith is ignited, and we jump in, and we realize it's not a chance at all; it is the answer.

Your heads bowed and your eyes closed. I'm asking you to turn to Jesus. Nobody loves you more than Him.