

The Kingship of Christ and the Authority of his Words

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone, and keep your Bibles open to Luke chapter 7, and we'll spend our time there this morning. Well, we've had a, well, I hope we've had a lovely series. I think we've had a good series on the kingship of Christ.

An important theme, in fact, the major theme of the New Testament. The New Testament has many themes, of course. It's not just one theme, but it's got to have a few major themes, and the kingship of Christ is obviously one of them.

In today's story, we're going to look at Jesus, the king, whose words carry power and authority. Now, words have tremendous power, don't they? Even our words.

There's a well-known experiment that was done by the manufacturing company IKEA. I think it was obviously part of an advertising campaign. Anyway, some years ago, they took two pot plants and set them up at a school, and each plant was housed a few meters apart and surrounded by some perspex shields, and each plant had a recording played to it, kind of non-stop, over a period of 30 days for about a month.

It might have been a few months. One plant had words of affirmation and encouragement, and the other plant had words that kind of broke down, words of anger and hate.

[1 : 18] Really, it was being bullied. You'll see a picture of how the plants started, and after 30 days, they looked really, really different. Isn't that amazing?

It makes you think, doesn't it, about the words that we use with each other or with our kids. Well, today we're going to learn something about the importance of words, and particularly the words that Jesus speaks.

Now, if our words have power, and they've got some power, they obviously don't have anything compared with Christ, but how much effect do you think the words of the living God of the universe has, or the words of his king, Jesus?

Well, let's have a look at Luke chapter 7 together. I'm just going to read one or two bits, and then we're going to start looking at how the story tells us about Jesus, and his kingship, and how his words have power.

So Luke chapter 7, and the first few verses, when Jesus had finished saying all these things, by the way, the context there is obviously, I think it's a sermon on the mount, and loving our enemies, judging others, etc., etc.

[2 : 28] He ends with a very important story about not just hearing his words, but putting his words into practice. After Jesus had finished saying all these things, in the hearing of all the people, he entered Capernaum.

Capernaum is a small little village on the north lake of the Sea of Galilee. It's actually a town. It's a ruin now, but it was obviously a big town in Jesus' day.

And there's a centurion. There, a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. It's a very serious situation. The centurion heard of Jesus, and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.

The first thing that stands out is the fact that a Roman centurion is asking help from Christ. And amazingly, that Jesus responds. Rome, as you know, is Israel's sworn enemy.

They're an occupying force, and the Roman army was known for its efficient brutality. It was a cold, hard, calculated killing machine. And then the backbone of the Roman army are these centurions.

[3 : 38] I think you've got a rare photo of a centurion in action over there. A centurion, as his name indicates, would be in charge of about 100 men. Actually, at the time of Christ, it was down to 80 men, but with some auxiliaries, so it was around 100 men.

The unit of 100 was, in turn, part of a larger unit of about 500 to 600 men, known as a cohort. And then there were 10 cohorts that made up a Roman legion, and that was one of their standing units.

So a legion was made up of between 5,000 and 6,000 fighting men. So I'm just giving you an idea of what these centurions were at the time of Christ.

Polybius, a Roman historian writing about 100 years before, says this about the centurions in the army. The leaders of the army wish that the centurions, not so much to be rash-headed daredevils, as to be natural leaders of a steady and steadfast spirit.

They do not desire them so much to be men who will initiate attacks and open the battle, but men who will hold their ground when worsted and hard-pressed and be ready to die at their posts.

[4 : 51] So in the centurion, we have someone who understands how authority works. He is both under authority and therefore knows where orders come from and where his place is in the scheme of things, but he also gives orders himself and expects them to be promptly and fully obeyed.

Two things you didn't do in the Roman army. You didn't ignore orders and you didn't question them. If you did, you died. So then, what is Jesus doing, even contemplating helping such an enemy of his people?

Surely he can see that such a person is unworthy or undeserving of his attention, let alone to receive a miraculous power and healing. So then the next question comes up.

Is the centurion worthy of receiving Christ's attention? And the question of the centurion's worthiness is central to the next section of the story. Have a look at verse 4 and 5.

When they came to Jesus, this is the Jews that the centurion sent, the Jewish leaders. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him. This man deserves to have you do this.

[5 : 58] This man deserves to have you do this because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue. Notice, the Jews base the centurion's worth upon what the centurion has done, building a synagogue.

By the way, you can actually still see that synagogue today. It's a ruin, as is the city of Capernaum. By the way, the city of Capernaum is a ruin because later on in the Gospel of Luke and Matthew and other places, Jesus pronounces a woe on the city because they didn't believe in him, although the centurion did.

But you can actually still see the ruins to this day. Nevertheless, the Jews base the centurion's worth on what he's done. He's worthy because of the things that he's done.

And you'll know that one of Jesus' issues with the Jewish leaders of his day is that they are full of this claim of being worthy to receive God's blessings and mercy based on a person's deeds, doing things that they think will impress God enough to kind of force his hand into loving them.

Well, they're actually mistaken because the centurion himself says that he's not worthy to receive Christ's attention. Have a look at verse 6. So Jesus went with them.

[7 : 17] He actually does go with them to try and help the centurion. He was not far from the house not to try and help the centurion, to help the centurion. 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.

That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word and my servant will be healed. Notice what the centurion does.

He addresses Jesus as Lord. A title of respect. So far we know, in the story so far, the Jewish leaders haven't addressed Jesus with such a high title like that.

And yet here's a foreigner who acknowledges Jesus' authority over him and is willing to humble himself under that authority. The centurion acknowledges that he is unworthy and undeserving to have Jesus come and help him.

But he's desperate to have him come and help. But he's obviously very aware that in Jesus there's someone who demands complete respect and comes to him in humility.

[8 : 27] Interestingly, the words of the centurion are actually incorporated into our prayer book in the words of humble access along with the words of the Canaanite woman. We pray it when we come to communion, when we do communion.

The words are, we did not presume to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, obviously reading from the old version, trusting in our own righteousness. So just notice that. We do not presume, that's the centurion's words, we're not worthy to come to this thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your, in thy manifold and great mercies.

We are not so worthy, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table, but thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy. Isn't that interesting? Now let's look at the words and authority, because the centurion obviously realizes or makes a claim about how he understands authority, and then he understands that Jesus has authority as well.

Clearly then, the centurion gets something about Jesus. He knows that all Jesus has to do is say a word, and his servant will be healed.

And he bases that knowledge on how authority works, because he too is someone under authority, and with authority over others. That's why he says, say the word, he says this to Jesus in verse 7, say the word, and my servant will be healed.

[9 : 53] 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.

So let's spend some time looking at how words work and how they are related to authority. Interesting, isn't it, that little comment that the centurion recognizes that just as he is under authority, so too Jesus is also under authority.

Just as the centurion has been given authority to rule from higher up, he must exercise that authority over the people placed under his jurisdiction. He gets orders from higher up and then gives them to those lower down.

You know, we all understand how authority works. Now we don't often think of Jesus as being under anyone's authority, but he is in fact under God's authority.

What that means is that he is acting under orders from God to carry out a mission. Now we don't often think of Jesus like that, but that's clearly what the centurion is talking about.

[11 : 02] Clearly Jesus doesn't have a problem with authority or with being even under it. He doesn't correct the centurion saying, no, no, you've got it all wrong, that's not the way to think about my relationship with God. Now this doesn't mean that Jesus is in any way inferior to God, but that he receives from God orders to do something.

That's what it means to be under God's authority. Well, why is this important? Well, for two reasons. Firstly, we need to remember that just as Jesus humbled himself to the will and command of God, so should we.

If he who is so much more highly exalted than any of us should think it necessary to humble himself to God's authority and obey him and do what he says, then who are we to think that we shouldn't? And secondly, remember that the whole problem with man started when we thought it wasn't necessary to be under God's authority or to obey him, but instead to do our own things in direct opposition to what he told us to do.

In fact, part of Jesus' whole mission is to bring us wild-headed, stubborn-hearted Gentiles back into obedience to God and his word.

Jesus both secures our obedience as well as shows us what it looks like. A very important feature in the Christian life is living in obedience to the commands of God and to his ruler, Jesus.

[12 : 22] So that's Jesus being under the authority of God. What about having authority over others? Now, the centurion himself has authority over others. He is the one who gives commands to his soldiers on the battlefield and his words are law.

You don't decide for yourself if you will obey or not or which parts or when. What's required in any army but particularly in the Roman army is instant and total obedience at all times.

They had this discipline feature called decimation. We have it in the English word. We think decimation is total destruction if something is totally decimated but it actually comes from the Roman practice of if you've showed weakness in battle or if you didn't show enough you weren't quick enough to obey the orders or you fell asleep on duty they would do this practice called decimation where they would line the whole centurion up the centurion up the centurion or the cohort and count off ten one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, tenth one gets the chop and he gets killed and they count again one, two, three, eight, nine, ten and tenth one gets killed.

So you don't go around disobeying orders and the centurion understands that. Instant total obedience all the time. Clearly he's explaining how authority works and he's exactly right. Verse eight 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. People in authority don't do the work themselves.

[14 : 07] They get people to do the work. That's how that's the whole point about being in authority. All you have to do is say a word or send an email or send a text and things get done.

Clearly the centurion is saying he can recognize that Jesus also must have this kind of authority. The authority to give orders and tell people what to do.

again notice Jesus doesn't correct the centurion's understanding of who he is. He accepts it and even praises him for being able to see this.

Have a look at verse nine. 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.

what then is the connection between faith and authority? This healing miracle illustrates for us the important link between faith in Christ and particularly what that faith must be in.

[15 : 10] Now there's many things to have faith in Christ but we're looking at this miracle today. What must we have faith in Jesus about? What must it contain? Must put something into that faith box.

I can't just yes I believe that he's there. We must believe certain things about him are you with me? Well must we believe that Jesus is our friend? Doesn't sound like he's trying to be our friend here.

What we must have faith in here in Luke 7 is that Jesus is a leader a ruler a king with authority and power and that his words have the ability to grant life or to withhold it.

His words in other words have real actual power. When Jesus speaks things actually change things actually happen. The centurion recognizes that Jesus has authority this kind of authority and he goes into detail to explain what he means by it and Jesus marvels at his faith.

So the faith that we have towards God the faith that saves us must have this element of understanding or acknowledging the power and authority that belongs to Christ. Are you with me on that?

[16 : 25] Now just how much power Jesus' words have is amply demonstrated in the next story in Luke. We don't have time to look at it in detail but just notice what happens.

Short while later Jesus is in a town called Nain it's some miles south of Capernaum and he just comes across a funeral procession. A woman who's a widow she's lost her husband and now she's lost her son.

Luke chapter 7 verse 13 when the Lord saw her his heart went out to her and he said don't cry then he went up and touched the coffin and those carrying it stood still he said young man I say to you get up the dead man sat up and began to talk and Jesus gave him back to his mother now that is real power it's one thing to be able to heal people that are still alive granted that's impressive none of us have that kind of power but there's a whole different level of power that you need if you want to bring dead people back to life okay will you agree with me that we're talking about serious amounts of power he just has to say to him get up then he just gets up Jesus speaks a few words and this boy's life is returned to him I don't know of anyone in all the universe that has more power than that and for that reason

I don't know anyone in all the universe I would rather know and be able to call on for help than someone who can raise the dead well let's think through together how we should live under the authority of Christ we've established the fact that he is a man with huge authority and power and that his words themselves carry this kind of authority and power to change life to bring healing and help and life why is it so important to have a strong and vibrant faith in a Jesus who has this kind of authority well mainly because that's the Jesus we meet in the gospels when you read the gospels you come face to face with this kind of Jesus one full of power and authority and yet there's so much too much in modern Christianity that seems to suggest that he doesn't actually have any power and authority we speak of him as a king but at the same time we're loath to give him the power and authority that is his due now I'm not saying we do that at

St. Mark's in fact it's one of the churches that will tell you about Jesus power and authority but much in modern Christianity that says Jesus doesn't give him that kind of a power and authority but we really need a king that can actually do things for us a king that does have power and authority because the things that Jesus fights off on our behalf things like sin and sickness death and the devil the things that he combats in the gospels these things are all too strong for us we can't handle them by ourselves we need help and so what we need is someone who can do that for us we need a savior a captain a lord a king who is able to deal decisively with these things on our behalf you get that having a Jesus with power and authority is absolutely imperative if we are going to be saved from the evils that we face in the world so it's actually a good thing that Jesus has this power and authority so he can do these things for us otherwise who's going to do it because we don't have the power ourselves now what about authority in the modern world again why am I reminding us that Jesus has all this power and authority well you know there's absolutely nothing in the modern world that tells us that living under anyone's authority other than our own made up authority is allowed is there any movie or

[20 : 36] TV show or TV series that helps us understand the importance of being obedient to those in authority over us least of all the God of the universe are there any TV shows that show children show kids that being obedient to your parents or parents loving their kids and helping them to grow up well are there any shows that motivate us to not have sex outside of marriage and that upholds a high view of the family and of being faithful to your wife and husband so the only place that you'll ever hear these things is going to be here at church it should of course also be in the home so let me address the moms and dads for a few minutes parents you must realize the only place your kids are going to hear about obedience and respect for authority is in your homes they won't be learning it at school leastways not most of the schools that we send them to you send them to a Christian school I'm sure it's different and that but they're not going to learn it from the world of entertainment in fact as you know they'll be learning the exact opposite that we have got that no one has got the right to tell you what to do it's your life it's your choice it's your decision it all comes down to you what they won't be taught is that living outside of God's ordained authority of the

God-ordained authority structures of the world it just makes your life miserable and as you know kids learn best by having a living example and that they must get from us as parents and lastly what about authority and prayer one last thing to think about from this miracle account in Luke 7 you notice in in Luke's account neither the centurion nor Jesus actually meet they're separated in in space not in time in space time and space I guess nor does Jesus actually go to the house and he doesn't actually see the sick servant but the servant is healed and the centurion's faith is commended all that happens is that the centurion sends messengers to Jesus to ask for help knowing that all it takes is a word from him and the servant will be healed now I guess in our lives we kind of face a similar situation Jesus is not here physically he is here by his spirit obviously but we are often beset on all sides by problems problems that we can't handle by ourselves and it's precisely at those times when Jesus seems so far and remote and we need him nearer and yet this is where Christ's power and authority come in so handy all we have to do is ask all we have to do is ask if we really need help more than just ourselves we can ask other Christians to act as our messengers and they can also ask for help on our behalf and then what happens

Jesus hears Jesus listens Jesus answers and Jesus acts so it's so important to understand that Jesus is a king and that the thing to get about that is that he is a king that listens to people who have faith in him he is a king that has power to answer and to act and to help he listens to people who believe that he has power and authority and that all it takes is for us to ask him and for him to speak and it becomes reality and people who believe that will spend much more time in prayer asking for help from above than spending time worrying about their problems down below well let's pray together then and ask and recognize that this Jesus is the king that we serve and ask him to help us for our daily lives dear Lord Jesus we recognize that you indeed are God's king and have been given all authority and power and that your words carry those that authority and power on our behalf

Lord you speak and people's wounds are healed you speak and dead people come back to life Lord we humble ourselves before you and acknowledge you as our king and as our Lord and ask you Lord to help us in our daily life we've got so many problems that we don't know how to deal with and we know they're small but they're big for us Lord and we need your help to conquer them please be gracious and kind and merciful act on behalf of your people to save and to help and to heal amen