

AMAZING JESUS

Sermon, June 5, 2016

Text: Luke 7:1-10

Amazing Jesus. Even from the day of His birth, He sparked amazement. Let me give you a very quick sampling of first hand accounts of how Jesus amazed all those whom He encountered.

Shortly after the shepherds in the hills of Bethlehem came telling the story of all they saw and heard, we read (Luke 2:18), "*And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.*" When as a young boy of twelve years of age Jesus was speaking with the elders in the temple, we read in Luke 2:47, "*Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and answers.*" In Luke 4, Jesus makes His first public speaking engagement in His home town synagogue of Nazareth, and we're told in verse 22, "*... and they were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips, asking 'Isn't this Joseph's son?'*" In the similar account in Matthew 13:54, we read, "*And they were amazed and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?'*" Later, in the nearby town of Capernaum, Luke 4:32 tells us, "*They were amazed at his teaching.*" Luke 4:36, "*The people were amazed and said to each other 'What is this teaching? With authority and power he drives out evil spirits.'*" In Luke 5:26, Jesus heals a paralytic, and there we're told, "*Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God.*" In Matthew 7:28, after Jesus delivered the two-chapter long Sermon on the Mount, we read, "*After Jesus finished saying all these things, the crowd was amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority.*"

Matthew and Mark both record the account of Jesus walking on the water and calming the stormy sea. Mark 6:51 reads, "*Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed.*" Matthew 8:27 reads, "*They were completely amazed and asked, 'What manner of man is this that even the winds and the waves obey him?'*" After another stupendous miracle, in Matthew 9:33 we read, "*... the crowd was amazed and said 'Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel!'*" Matthew 15:31, "*The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.*" In Matthew 21:20, after Jesus cursed a poor little fig tree which then withered on the spot: "*When the disciples saw this they were amazed, 'How did the fig tree wither so quickly?'*" Also in Matthew, when Jesus gave the profound and concise reply to the Pharisees about taxation, "Give to Caesar what is Caesars and to God what is God's," we read in Matthew 22: 22, "*When they heard this they were amazed.*"

And let me give just a few select verses from Mark's gospel; Mark used this adjective pretty frequently when speaking of this amazing man: Mark 1:22, "*The people were amazed at his teaching.*" Mark 5:20, "*And all the people were amazed (this was after the healing of the Gerasene demoniac and the subsequent "deviled ham" miracle).*" Mark 7:3, "*... they were overwhelmed with amazement.*" Mark 10:24, "*The disciples were amazed at his words.*" Mark 10:26, "*The disciples were even more amazed.*" Mark 11:18, "*... the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.*" Mark 12:17. "*And they were amazed at him.*"

Only twice in the Gospels, interestingly, do we read that this amazing Jesus was Himself amazed! What does it take to amaze the amazing Jesus? In Mark 6:6 we are told He was **amazed** at the lack of faith in the people of His own hometown, and in today's reading we are told He was **amazed** by the quality of faith displayed by a Roman centurion, who said to Jesus, "*Only speak the word and my servant will be healed. 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.*" We then read, "*When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd he said, 'I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.'*" Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well."

This is admittedly reading between the lines a bit, but I think this Roman centurion amazed Jesus because he apparently believed and acknowledged and honored Jesus' authority! Let me expand on that a bit. This man lived his life as a link in the chain of command. In the Roman system all "authority" belonged to the emperor and was delegated. Therefore, by delegation the centurion was under the emperor's authority; when the centurion spoke, he spoke with the emperor's authority, and so his command was obeyed. A foot soldier who disobeyed would be defying not just the centurion but the emperor; for that matter, the foot soldier would be defying the empire itself, with all its imperial majesty and might, as the emperor was the embodiment of the empire's authority. By inference, then, this centurion is acknowledging and affirming Jesus' divine authority! He is acknowledging that what Jesus says, goes! He is acknowledging Jesus speaks and commands with all the authority and majesty and might of heaven and the God of heaven.

Now, as a bit of an aside, does this passage tell us if only we have enough faith in Jesus' authority that the people we love will be healed? No, I don't think that's what it is saying. I've lost count of how many times someone has said to me, "*Pastor, I have prayed and prayed and prayed about this thing, and nothing is changing ... I must not have enough faith. That's it, isn't it?*" No, I don't think that's it. I do not believe the Bible teaches God makes healing contingent upon the quantity or quality of our faith, or the sincerity of our prayers, or the number of our prayers, or the number of people we get to pray for us, or the supposed spiritual status of those who are praying. Sometimes God does choose to heal in response to our prayers, but miraculous healing comes only as an occasional gift from the Creator. It's a gift, not a right we can somehow earn and expect and manipulate out of Him by saying the right words.

So, then, why do we pray when people we love are in distress? We do so for the same reason this centurion came to Jesus. In our prayers we come before Jesus to place our loved ones in His hands *trusting in His authority*, trusting in His sovereign will, believing that in life and in death we belong to God, and that nothing will separate us from His love ... and may His will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.

This centurion had placed himself under the authority of the Savior Jesus. He recognized Jesus' authority. I believe what Jesus found so amazing in the centurion was that his faith was not in what he wanted to have happen; his faith was in Jesus, no matter what happened. That's pretty much my message this morning; let me say it again: *Our faith is not in what we want to have happen; our faith is in Jesus, no matter what happens.* That's the kind of faith that amazes the amazing Jesus. And we display that faith by putting ourselves under His authority.

Why does that amaze Jesus? Well, perhaps one reason is that so much in our world entices us to resist the authority of others. We resist and easily break laws if we find them inconvenient for us. We insist only upon the authority of our own rights, even if we have now confused our rights with our desires. But to follow Jesus means to come under His authority and the authority of His words, even when those words are difficult, even if the words He speaks are not the words we wanted to hear. There's some hard stuff said in the Bible. Bible reading doesn't always make me feel good, nor does it always endorse my way of thinking. Jesus gives us some hard words, like words about how we should use our money, how we spend our time, how we should live our lives and how we should satisfy our appetites. The words of Jesus make clear some things are wrong ...not wrong because they are inexpedient, or inconvenient, but wrong because they are declared wrong by Jesus with all the loving *authority* of heaven.

(Note: the following excerpt was edited out on the spot during sermon delivery due to time constraints; I include it here in this manuscript ...slc) That does not mean that just because some of the words of Jesus are hard they are not loving. Where did we ever get the idea that because words are hard they cannot also be loving? When doctors diagnose a serious illness, would it be loving for them to say, "Well, I don't want to appear judgmental. You can ignore these tumors and this fever if you want, just do what you think feels right for you." Absolutely not. The loving thing is for the doctor to say, "You have a disease and this is what you have to do to get better!" (end of excerpt)

Once we understand just Who Jesus is, once we understand His immense love for us, once we trust in His loving authority, then we start to discover that His authority can be a wonderful thing to live under. Freedom comes *not* from throwing off authority. Freedom comes from living under the authority of a Savior Who loves us more than we even love ourselves, Who wants nothing but the best for us, and Who speaks with all the loving authority of the God Who created us and loved us so much that He sent His only Son into this world to save us and give us life to the full. To be under the authority of Jesus means that sometimes we may not understand what He says or does, but we nevertheless trust and honor His authority. He is Lord; we are not.

Genuine faith ... the kind of faith that amazes even Jesus ... is a faith that trusts when the reasons for trusting are evident, and when the reasons for trusting are not. To be under His authority means that sometimes we may not fully understand what He says or does. Yes, the centurion's servant was healed within the hour; that's a wonderful story. But how do I explain all the other faithful people in Palestine who had loved ones who were not healed while Jesus was there? Who among us has not been up nights praying and praying for things that did not happen? How do I explain the members of our own faithful families who have suffered untimely death? Well, I can't. I can't always explain Jesus. If I could, He would be under my authority. Our faith is not in what we want to have happen ... real faith, the kind of faith that even amazes Jesus ... is faith and trust in this amazing Jesus, no matter what happens.