

Bi132 The Gospels

Lesson Bi132-19 Power Over Death

Did Jesus come to save the Jews or Gentiles? As more people encountered Jesus and his miracles, the news spread. Now Greeks and Romans lived in the region, as well as Jews. Even though Jesus came primarily for the lost people of Israel, he reached out to people wherever he found needs. Perhaps the greatest needs were the fear of death and death itself. Crowds followed Jesus. They wanted to hear his teaching and see what he would do. He told everyone to repent and believe, regardless of their background.

In the first century, a Roman army official in charge of 100 soldiers was called a 'centurion.' In Capernaum lived a centurion's servant whom his master valued highly. He was sick and very near death. The anxious centurion heard of Jesus and desperately sent some of the Jewish leaders to him, asking him to come and heal the servant. When they met Jesus they begged him to go with them, saying, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

So Jesus went with them, even though as a Jew he would defile himself if he entered a Gentile's house. As they neared the man's house, the Roman officer sent friends to Jesus with this message. "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. I understand authority. When I give orders, my soldiers obey 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" (Luke 7:2-8).

Jesus was amazed at him and said to the crowd following him, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith in all of Israel!" Matthew's account of this story adds more of Jesus' words commending the Gentile centurion's faith, "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And the servant was healed at that very hour (Matt 8:11-13).

This Gentile army official, a centurion, expresses his faith in Jesus by speaking about authority. He has authority from Rome, but that is nothing compared to the authority Jesus has over sickness and death. He sees himself as unworthy of receiving Jesus into his home or even his presence. He has built a local synagogue which suggests he was a 'God fearer,' but not an actual convert to Judaism. He may have realized that Jesus was indeed the Messiah whom he had heard about from the rabbis, but somehow he believed Jesus would help him. Jesus commends the faith of this Gentile man and others, contrasting it to the arrogant unbelief of many of the Jewish leaders, who would be punished in the end for their lack of faith.

From Capernaum Jesus went to the town of Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As they approached the town gates, they saw a funeral procession. The

dead person being carried out was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the town was with her.

Jesus saw her desperate situation and his heart went out to her. He said, “Don’t cry.” He then went up and touched the open coffin and those carrying it stood still. Jesus said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!”

The dead man sat up and began to talk. No doubt he looked around and asked what was happening. Jesus helped him down and gave him back to his mother. The crowd was filled with awe, and began immediately to praise God. “A great prophet has appeared among us, they said. “God has come to help his people.” As the crowd dispersed, the news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

The widow of Nain’s situation was even more desperate and hopeless than the centurion’s. Her only son was already dead. He was being carried out of the city gates to the cemetery. Without a son or perhaps any male relative to help her, she might have faced enslavement or abuse in order to survive. Jesus first spoke comfort to the woman. Then he spoke to the dead man and told him to get up. The son began to talk, perhaps confused about why he was the center of a large crowd. Jesus had come to meet this Jewish woman’s need even before she asked.

What do these two stories have in common? Luke wanted to show that Jesus has power to destroy the works of Satan—death and the fear of death. In both cases there was sorrow, anxiety, and a sense of hopelessness until Jesus came on the scene. In both accounts Jesus expressed love and compassion for those suffering. One person in need was a Gentile and one a Jew. One was male, the other female. The first man healed was a slave; the widow’s son was a free man.

In both instances, the Jewish crowd following Jesus is again confronted with the questions, “Who is this man Jesus? Is he just a great prophet or is he really the long awaited Messiah, our king?” The result of both miracles was that the fame of Jesus spread across the land, and even beyond to other areas.

Many of the common people rejoiced, but the leaders in Jerusalem feared Jesus even more. He did not fit into their understanding of God’s Messiah nor was he from their group of religious authorities. They had never heard of anyone having power over death itself. They feared losing control over the people of Israel and that as a result, the Romans might destroy the Jewish nation and their temple.

This story is **important** because it shows the power of God through signs and wonders to make unbelievers consider the real identity of Jesus and to strengthen the faith of believers.

The **main truth** of this story is that Jesus has power to destroy both sickness—which brings the fear of death—and death itself. These are among the most powerful works of Satan which Jesus came to destroy.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What was Luke's purpose in writing down these two stories?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, "Luke wanted to show that Jesus has power to destroy the works of Satan, both the fear of death and death itself," you are correct.
2. What did Jesus say to the dead man in the village of Nain?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered that Jesus said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" you are correct.
3. What was it that amazed Jesus when He heard the words of the Centurion?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If your response is that Jesus said, "I have not found such great faith in all of Israel!" you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to memorize this story and tell it to a friend. After completing the story, talk with a friend about the fear of death in your culture. How does this fear influence how people live and what they believe? Introduce your friend to Jesus and tell them about his love for them. Share with them the scripture that says, "Perfect love casts out fear" (1John 4:18).