

# “We Are Not Worthy”

Luke 7:1-10

The temple in Jerusalem was considered one of the most magnificent buildings in the ancient world. Its interior walls were walls were made of gold. It is estimated that about 23 tons of gold were used in constructing it. As Solomon is offering his prayer of dedication, he says, “Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house I have built!”

That temple, in and of itself, is not worthy of being called the place where God dwells. Yet, Solomon is certain that it shall be the place where God dwells because God has said, “My name shall be there.” God placed His name upon that temple and called it His own, even though there is no physical structure, no matter how many tons of gold can be found there; there is no single place that is truly worthy of God’s presence or attention.

This brings us to Jesus in Capernaum. There is a centurion, a Roman official, who had a servant that was sick and dying. He sent word through the Jewish leaders asking Jesus to come and heal his servant.

And the Jews came to Jesus and pleaded with Him to come and do this because, “He is worthy to have you do this for him.” Why is this centurion worthy in the eyes of the Jews? He loves the nation of Israel and made the building of the synagogue possible.

Their statement speaks volumes concerning their own “faith” and attitude toward God. If this Gentile, who loves their nation and supports the synagogue, is worthy of good things and favors from God – then certainly they are worthy also.

This gets to the heart of our sinful condition. The true Gospel, proclaimed by God’s Word and Christ’s church throughout the ages, is that faith has empty hands. The only thing we can hold before Him to show our worthiness is our sin. Here are my sins Jesus. Here are the things I have done. I hate them. The only hope I have is You. I have nothing that makes me worthy. Christ alone saves.

This is repentance leading to salvation. This is why we confess that we are poor miserable sinners – because we are. As I said last week, there is no “easy button” in regard to salvation. Faith in God is not easy. At least faith in the true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as He presents Himself in Scripture is not easy. True faith requires you to see yourself as unworthy of the grace and favor of God.

However, as Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, there are some who want to distort the Gospel of Christ. There are those who will tell you that if you just have enough faith, good things will come your way. Be the best you that you can be, and God wants to bless you in this life and in the life to come.

The “easy” message of those seeking the approval of man rather than the approval of God (to paraphrase Paul) leads to the question of “am I worthy?” This feeds into our culture so beautifully. We live in a world of narcissists. Simply put, narcissism is being in love with your self, and not being nearly as highly concerned about the feelings or well-being of others.

This is the opposite of what God commands in His Law: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Google the term “Narcissism epidemic” and do some reading. It is truly frightening. Psychologists 50 or 60 years ago wrote about the rare instances of true narcissism. It is rapidly becoming the norm. I don’t have time to walk through the process of how we got to this point, but all of the vain attempts to artificially pump up the self-esteem of our young people without ever having to really achieve something has not been helpful. The goal was to make them feel worthy. The end result has been that they feel self-important which leads to emptiness when reality sets in.

We have created a culture where everyone is supposed to be deemed worthy. Psychologists have noted that the attempt to boost self-esteem has created a world of narcissists. And it has really done anything to truly boost self-esteem. We have a generation of girls who beat themselves up because they don't look like the airbrushed models on magazine covers (no one looks like that, not even the ones posing for the pictures). And we have a generation of boys who do not have the confidence to act according to the rules of chivalry.

Being kind, gentle, considerate, and forgiving is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of strength. I do not understand the worldview that being a self-absorbed, obnoxious jerk makes you cool. I know there are shows like "The Jersey Shore" that trumpet this very odd view (or at least it should be an odd view). Unfortunately, it is a growingly common view.

Listen to the world around us. “It is my body, I can do what I want.” Classic narcissism. This is nothing new. It is not like there has ever been a generation without sin. The Epicureans in Jesus day said, “If it feels good,

do it.” The dark side of the false pride fueled by unmerited self-importance is that reality always sets in.

The Law is always there condemning you and you stand there empty handed – feeling empty inside and unworthy. This is reality. So our sinful nature seeks distractions from reality. Perhaps we self-medicate with drugs or alcohol and escape from reality for a little while. Perhaps it is a string of unhealthy relationships – always with the promise that the next one will be the one. Maybe it is just living vicariously through the lives of the people we see on television or the characters on a video game. The problem is that distractions have to keep getting more intense in order to keep us distracted from the reality of the Law.

The people of God are called to hold an undistorted view of the Gospel. The centurion holds a very different faith than the Jews. The centurion sent some friends saying, “I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.” He was most likely the highest ranking person in the town. He has no delusion of self-importance. Like Solomon, in his prayer at the temple, this centurion knows there is no place on earth that deserves to have the presence of God.

You and I do not deserve to have the presence of God in our lives. We are not worthy. This grace comes from outside of you. This “temple” of your body is not worthy to bear the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Yet, God has decreed through the reality of your Baptism that “My Name shall be there”; on you, and you shall be the temple of my Holy Spirit. Amen.