

November 11, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Luke 7:1-10.

1. Describe the life or setting of a typical centurion.
2. Who were the Jewish elders and why did they consider the centurion worthy of Jesus's attention?
3. What were some of the centurion's traits pointed out in this text that indicate he was unique?
4. Do you think the centurion was regenerated?
5. How could God the Son *marvel* (to be amazed) and in what other one situation do we find that word used to describe Him?

SUCH FAITH Luke 7:1-10

We live in such a world of make-believe that it is difficult for some people to identify that which is not real. Television is not real. What you see on your T.V. are temporary sets, actors, and particular camera shots that leave out all the stuff that would remind you that it is not realistic. When an actor makes a mistake, or a set falls over, the producer simply cuts the action and does a retake to make the whole thing look realistic.

Pat and I recently went to a production of *Anastasia*. The on stage backdrops and stuff they did with video presentations was

impressive. But it wasn't real. It was presented in a way to draw the audience in so that we would forget it was make-believe.

Even reality television is not real because in reality there is no one at your remodeling job with a camera taking videos and interviewing you about how the project is going. And video games are definitely not real even though people who are addicted to them experience very real addiction.

Now here is the irony. Your culture—the one that is wholly immersed in make-believe—chides you for saying you have faith. They respond, “Get real.” “You need to live in the world of reality.” Do you wonder if the expression of faith in God and His Word is equivalent to living in a fantasy world? Is my faith really just hope in the figment of my imagination? God defined faith in Him as *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1)*. How can we have full assurance about the things we hope for? How can we be fully convinced about things not seen?

Our faith rests in the full assurance that God has spoken and God is faithful to His Word. That was the kind of assurance that the centurion in ancient Israel expressed when he requested Jesus to heal his servant. The man obviously knew something about Jesus. He obviously believed that Jesus could heal his servant just like He had healed so many others. Therefore, the man acted according to his faith. In fact, if he had not sent a request to Jesus, he would have proven that he had no faith in Jesus at all.

Because our actions are indicative of our faith, what can we conclude about our faith by reviewing our actions? Is it real? Do we trust the word of Jesus with full assurance, being fully convinced that His promise to keep His word is more certain than the world of make-believe that is evident all around us?

A Worthy Man Expressed Faith in Jesus (vv.1-5).

The first verse of our text briefly lays out the situation of this story about faith. It happened when Jesus entered Capernaum. *After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum (v.1)*. Jesus had finished describing the character of people who truly follow Him. In that “sermon on the level,” we learned that we who are true citizens of the kingdom of heaven have

admitted that we are spiritual beggars and, therefore, must rely solely on Jesus's grace for salvation (6:20). We are characterized by a hunger and thirst for Jesus's righteousness (6:21). We share Jesus's suffering when sinners persecute us (6:22). We practice Christ-kind of love even toward our enemies (6:27-36). We are careful and accurate in our judgment, measuring ourselves first (6:37-42). We assess the fruit of others who claim to be righteous trees even while we assess our own fruit the same way (6:43-44). We judge the words that we speak as being indicative of what is in our hearts (6:46-47). We build our spiritual house on the words of Jesus (6:48-49).

Having established these characteristics about people who have faith in Him, Jesus entered Capernaum. This was home base during Jesus's earthly ministry. And yet Jesus must have lived with Peter or one of the other disciples from that area because He didn't have a home. He just entrusted Himself to the Father to care for Him.

In that setting, we learn about a centurion who had a sick servant. *Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him (v.2)*. A centurion was no ordinary man. He represented the strength and organization of the Roman army. Though he would have been in authority over 100 soldiers, he probably would have been equivalent to a high-ranking officer in one of our branches of service (a major or colonel). We can speculate that this was a man who had worked hard, fought hard, and proven to be faithful and loyal in order to achieve this rank. Beyond question, he was a leader of men. And, like most upper-class, leader-kind-of-people in 1st century Rome, he owned slaves.

While owning slaves was a pretty common thing in that culture, it was quite unusual for a man of such authority to have any concern for a slave. Though most English translations use the word "servant," the Greek word refers more precisely to a slave (*doulos*). There is a different Greek word used when the writer chose to speak of a servant as opposed to the lower category, slave. That Greek word is *diakonos*, which gives us the English word deacon. That would have been the better word to use if the issue was the centurion's servant. But *doulos* can refer to the most lowly of slaves to a household manager.

Whatever the man's position, he was a slave and in that culture slaves were expendable. One Roman writer on farm management recommended that annually the farmer needed to inspect his tools and

implements and throw out those that were broken. He recommended the same response to slaves that were no longer able to do their duty.

We see that attitude demonstrated in the Old Testament when David and his men pursued the Amalekites who had destroyed Ziklag and took their possessions and families. Along the way, they found an Egyptian slave who was nearly dead. Giving him food and drink they learned from him: "*I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master left me behind because I fell sick three days ago*" (1 Samuel 30:13). That is what the ancients did with sick slaves.

But this centurion was different than all the stereotypes found in the Old and New Testaments. At this early point in the story, we should suspect that this man was different from the norm. In fact, later in the text we read that the centurion referred to his slave with the term *pias*, which is a term of endearment speaking of a child. It might be that the slave was actually a young man. Whatever the case might have been, we must wonder what there was about this centurion that made him respond to his slave according to the traits Jesus commended in the previous sermon (6:20-49).

That wondering might be deepened when we read that the centurion sent for Jesus. *When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant (v.3)*. The text plainly reveals that the centurion sent for Jesus because he had heard about Him. How did a battle-hardened leader of Roman soldiers hear about the meek and mild Teacher from Nazareth? We know that because of Jesus's authoritative teaching and miraculous works of healing and exorcism, word was traveling quickly through the region. Maybe a friend came and told him the good news.

That the man was a soldier did not prevent him from hearing and responding. We know from Mark's account that the Roman soldier at the cross was convinced about the truth that Jesus was the Son of God. Paul had multiple opportunities to share the good news about Jesus with Roman soldiers who guarded him. He wrote to the Christians in Philippi, *So that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ (Philippians 1:13)*. There were even servants (and maybe soldiers) in Caesar's household who came to faith in Christ

(Philippians 4:22). The Jail Keeper in Philippi who came to faith in Christ was a similar kind of rough and tough guy.

Having heard that Jesus was very possibly the promised Messiah and that He was healing people, the centurion sent elders to request Jesus's help. We assume that these were Jewish elders (leaders in the Centurion's hometown) based on their eyewitness account of the man (vv.4-5). What kind of Gentile soldier could convince Jewish leaders to do his bidding? There was something very unusual about his man.

Maybe we can learn the secret about the centurion as we consider his reputation. People said the man was worthy. *And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him"* (v.4). The Jewish elders did their best to convince Jesus to come and heal the centurion's servant. They begged Jesus earnestly. Why were they so intense and put the pressure on Jesus? They all concluded that this man was worthy of Jesus's help. That was a typical Jewish response. It was in keeping with their opinion that we can keep God's law, do enough good works, to make us worthy in the sight of God and man. Their assessment of the man drove them to beg Jesus.

People gave evidence of the man's worth. *For he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue* (v.5). The centurion's worth, value, was revealed in the way he showed kindness to the Jews. Though he was a Gentile, he showed love for the Jews. He demonstrated his love building a synagogue in the town where he lived. Obviously then he was wealthy. Did his wealth play into the Jews' assessment of his worth?

Notice that this is an example of a man who, being a Gentile, was hated by the Jews as a whole, but he did kind deeds for them. He loved his enemies even though their fellow Jews would have spoken all manner of evil against him. It is not difficult to conclude that the Jews' appreciation of this man was all based on how he benefitted them. But why did the centurion do good works for the Jews?

And so in your mixed-up culture, worth is determined by how you act and interact regarding passing things like trends, ideas, philosophies, people, and stuff. In that opinion, human worth never rises above the temporary, the mundane, the stuff of earth. Therefore, worth is typically determined only by humanistic instruments of

measure. But what good is it to be measured well by fellow humans only to arrive at the same end at which all humans arrive—death and eternity? We are wise to establish real and eternal worth. How do we do that? Solomon concluded, *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). But Solomon did not stop there. He went on to teach that God is the eternal assessor of worth. *For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil* (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

What do you plan to do in order to pass that test of eternal worth or value? How many good works and how much keeping of commands will it take for God to assess your work as "good" versus "evil"? And what do you do with God's assessment that all of our best works are filthy in God's eyes: *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away* (Isaiah 64:6). Read on and learn from the centurion.

The Man Expressed Faith, Not Self-Worth (vv.6-10).

The Jews did their best to convince Jesus that the wealthy benefactor was worthy of Jesus's attention. The centurion actually disagreed with them and told Jesus, "I am not worthy." This man of faith, like all men of faith, admitted his unworthiness. He did not feel worthy to bring Christ into his presence. *And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof"* (v.6).

Here we learn that Jesus submitted to the centurion's request and made His way toward the town. Learning that Jesus was on His way, the centurion sent more friends to dissuade Jesus from entering his house. Why? He concluded that he was not worthy of Christ's fellowship, and he refused to come into Christ's presence. The man of faith sent word to Jesus to explain that his view of personal unworthiness is the reason *I did not presume to come to you* (v.7a).

It was because of his own perceived lack of worth that he did not go to Jesus himself. It wasn't that the guy simply pulled rank when he allowed the Jewish elders to take the request to Jesus.

Though the centurion did not understand all the mixed-up ramifications about the Jewish religion, he no doubt concluded that because Jesus was a Jew, He would more likely listen to Jews.

How ironic that the man who the Jews presented as most worthy of Jesus's attention considered himself unworthy of Jesus. It sounds like he was one of those people who considered himself to be a spiritual beggar. He had nothing to offer Jesus in exchange for Jesus's kind works. He understood the natural human condition of being spiritual beggars. In vivid contrast to the Jews, though this man was rich in possessions and good works, he concluded that he was a spiritual beggar who was wholly dependent on Jesus.

That man who esteemed Jesus so highly expressed his faith. *But say the word, and let my servant be healed (v.7b)*. The ESV translation makes an incredible statement. The verb for "healed" is an aorist passive imperative, which means the man requested, "Allow my child to be healed." In this statement, the centurion revealed his tender heart for his slave. But at the same time, he revealed incredible faith in Jesus's word. This man concluded that the healing or lack of healing was completely tied up in Jesus's word. The man could do nothing, the Jewish elders could do nothing, the slave could do nothing to bring about the healing. The centurion depended on, leaned on, the word of Jesus alone. What a wonderful condition!

How does that same attitude work for us? This is the only path to salvation. Full dependance in faith means no more attempts to make God like us. When there is real faith, there are no more works to force God to give us salvation. Only complete and full reliance on His promise to forgive our sins when we confess them and repent.

This is also the only path to living by faith. *The person who God has made righteous lives by faith (Romans 1:17)*. Because God has blotted out our sins. Because God has clothed us in the righteousness of Christ. We live moment by moment fully trusting what He says in the Bible.

Faith embraces Christ's power to do (vv.8-10). In explaining why he trusted our Lord's word, the centurion gave a great illustration of faith. *For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, "Go," and he goes; and to another, "Come," and he comes; and to my servant, "Do this," and he does it (v.8)*. The principle he expressed is simple. A person with

authority is expected to command a subordinate. The centurion used the illustration of his authority to command subordinates. We can assume that he did it all the time. The subordinate didn't have a choice, no options. When the superior commanded, the subordinate had to obey.

And this centurion was fully convinced the same was true when Jesus spoke with His divine authority. We must agree with him. When Jesus (who is the supreme authority) commands, we expect results. Jesus had proven this many times before this interaction with the centurion. Jesus spoke and fish filled the net. He spoke and water turned into wine. He spoke and the blindness disappear, the deafness was gone, the withered hand was restored, the lame man got up and walked. He spoke and demons fled their victims. And best of all, when Jesus spoke, sins were blotted out. Remember how Jesus explained this wonderful reality when the religious leaders argued with Him. *"But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" he said to the man who was paralyzed – "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home" (Luke 5:24)*.

Do we have this kind of implicit faith in Christ's words? When we read the Bible, we need to stop and apply the promises to ourselves. It is good to keep a notepad or write in the margins of your Bible when you recognize how the promises apply to you. We need to stop applying Bible truths generally and vaguely and start apply them to us specifically. We need to be diligent to believe that Jesus's words are absolute authority. Words like, *"But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!" (Luke 12:28)*. Or, *"If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you" (Luke 17:6)*. And *"Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith" (Matthew 21:22)*.

Faith is the key in prayer. Faith shapes the life behind the prayer. A.W. Pink observed, "These are the elements, dear reader, which enter into the prayer which is acceptable to God and which meets with a response from devotion: there must be an actual drawing near of the soul unto the living God, and for that, there must be a putting away and forsaking of all that is offensive to Him." (A.W.

Pink, *The Life of Elijah*, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2017 reprint, 157.)

When Jesus heard the centurion's explanation, He commented on how great the man's faith was. He commended the man's faith. *When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (v.9).* The word for marveled means to be amazed. It is found over 30 times in the Gospel accounts. The word is used to describe how Jesus regularly amazed the disciples, the crowds, and even the religious leaders and Pilate. But only twice do we read that Jesus marveled. He was amazed at the people's unbelief (Mark 6:6). And here we learn that Jesus was amazed at the centurion's faith.

The really great news is that Jesus granted the man's request. *And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well (v.10).* As far as we know, the centurion never met Jesus. However, he and his slave were the recipients of Jesus's blessing. Every indication is that the man was regenerated by the Holy Spirit miracle of new life. He met Jesus when he died.

Faith is not the hope a person exercises if he buys a lottery ticket. The odds of faith are way better than 3.5 million to one. Faith is the implicit trust, the full confidence, the certain looking forward to the truth that God keeps His Word. We seldom know God's timing, and often are oblivious to His purposes in us, but we must be certain that He is worthy of our trust.