

Subject: A Veteran's Highest Honor

Scripture: Matthew 8:5-13

To serve our country is a very high honor. Some of our men have also received special honors. The Bible tells us of a Roman soldier who received the highest possible honor. It was not an honor given by the Roman army or by the emperor. It was an honor given to him by Christ. This soldier was probably a very brave man, but it wasn't an honor for his courage or his length of service or his rank. It was an honor given for something else far more important.

This man was a veteran. He was a centurion, an officer over 100 men. Every time we read of centurion in the Bible it is in a positive light. Remember the centurion who watched Jesus die on the cross and he said, "Truly this was the Son of God (Mt. 27:54). Remember a centurion named Cornelius who was described in Acts 10:2, as a devout man who feared God with all his family, gave to the needy, and was a man of prayer. He was a centurion in the Roman army, which means he was a Gentile. We know this centurion loved and respected the Jews because Luke 7:5 tells us he built them a synagogue at Capernaum. He was an unknown veteran (we don't know his name), but this is what we know. He was a veteran who was commended by Jesus for his great faith (vs. 10). What was so special about this man's faith and how can we follow his example?

1. He had a sense of urgency and need (vs. 5-6)

He came "beseeching" (urging, begging) Christ on behalf of his servant. His felt a sense of desperation.

2. He showed genuine humility and complete trust in Christ (vs. 7-8)

He didn't suggest what Christ ought to do. He didn't feel worthy that Christ should come to his house because he was a Gentile and Christ was a Jew. In Luke 7:1-10, we read that the centurion at first sent others to Christ and then eventually spoke to him face to face. This man knew that Jesus could heal his servant just by speaking the word.

3. He understood Christ's supreme authority (vs. 9)

All veterans understand how the chain of command works. As you get promoted, you are under authority and you have people under your authority, and you are expected to conduct yourself within the limits of that authority. This centurion understood that Jesus was someone with divine authority.

4. Christ praised this man for his faith (vs. 10)

When Jesus saw heard what the centurion said, He marveled. This is one of only two times where the Bible says that Jesus marveled. The other was the unbelief of the Jews:

Mark 6:6 *And he marveled because of their unbelief.*

Jesus said He had not found so great faith in all of Israel. This man was a Gentile, not a Jew. The Jews knew about God and they should have been ready to believe in Him, but for the most part they didn't.

John 1:11-12 ¹¹ *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.* ¹² *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*

5. Christ pointed to him as an example of saving faith (vs. 11-12)

Jesus used this man's faith as an object lesson to teach an important lesson. The people least likely to be saved will be in heaven and the people who seem most likely to be saved will be in hell. Gentiles will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in heaven. But the children of the kingdom (people of Jewish birth and religious heritage) will be in hell. This was directly opposite of what the Jewish people thought and believed.

The point of this story is to show the one determining factor whether a person is saved and will go to heaven is true faith in Christ.

6. Christ healed the centurion's servant because of his faith (vs. 13)

Jesus honored and rewarded this man's faith. Christ honors faith because faith honors Him. Jesus healed him immediately and completely.

Hebrews 11:6 *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

This veteran's highest honor was to humble himself and come to Christ in true faith. His highest honor was to have Christ's approval regardless of what others may think or say. His highest honor was to be welcome in heaven and be with all of God's dear children.

This veteran's honor can be your honor if you have the same kind of faith he had.