

03/25/12

Astonishing Faith

- Would you agree with me this morning that Jesus Christ was an astonishing person?
 - would that be the understatement of the morning?...
- the details about the birth of Jesus were unusual at every turn...
 - the fulfilled prophecies...the virgin conception...the shepherds...the angels...the manger...the Innkeeper...John the Baptist's parents...the little town of Bethlehem...
 - pick practically any detail about his birth and you'd say – that's not anything like we would have predicted...it's astonishing...
- the same is true about His teaching...
 - no one would say – well, Jesus just taught what everyone else was already thinking...He just borrowed from other teachers at the time...no original content...it was all so predictable...
 - it's just the opposite, isn't it?...you find yourself constantly saying...what?...did I hear that correctly?...I would have never expected that...His teaching is astonishing...
- we could make the same point about His works...
 - certainly the healings and the miracles were completely out of the ordinary...the world had never seen such deeds before...
 - but even His interactions with people...calling people like common fishermen and sinful tax collectors to be His disciples...
 - or going to Samaria to speak with a woman at a well who had been married five times and was currently living with yet another man...or his discussion with Nicodemus about needing to be born again...
 - event after event after event is often the opposite of what you would have expected...it's simply astonishing...
- in his commentary on Luke, John MacArthur makes that observation and then goes on to say—that there are only two places in Scripture where Jesus is said to be astonished...
 - one is when the Lord returned to his hometown and the people that He had grown up around were so incensed when He suggested that the mission God gave Him included people from other ethnic groups that they tried to push him over a cliff...
 - Mark recorded that “He wondered at their unbelief” (6:6)...that astonished Him...
 - the other example is the one we're going to study this morning...only this time it was when Jesus was astonished by a person's faith...He was so taken back that he turned to those around Him and said...”not even in Israel have I found such great faith...”
- before we look at the verses, let me ask you a couple more questions about that...
 - do you have people in your life today whose faith astonishes you?...
 - maybe it's a single mom who's trying to juggle all the responsibilities of caring for her children, and working, and keeping up the house, and dozens of other things—yet does it with grace and dignity and trust in the Lord...and that impacts you...
 - or maybe it's someone caring for a loved one whose terminally ill...and it's an incredible weight and there might be all sorts of reasons to complain about the circumstances...but this person relies on the promises of God and perseveres with quiet faith and sacrificial actions...and you're astonished...
 - do you have some people in your life whose faith causes you to marvel?...to be amazed that God could help someone live in such an inspirational fashion?...and do you find yourself drawing strength from their example?

- what about from the other side of the equation...do you possess astonishing faith?...do the choices you make cause others to be amazed at what God is doing in and through you?...
 - would people say that they can draw strength from you as they watch the way you choose to follow the Lord?...
 - could your children say that if you're a parent?
 - could your friends say that...extended family members, co-workers, neighbors?...
 - could that be said about our church?...should that be one of our goals as we grow and serve together?...
- this morning we want to talk about **Building Core Strength by Practicing Astonishing Faith...**
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to Luke chapter 7...page 50 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- I appreciate the work that our service pastors did last Sunday...if you're relatively new, that term may be new but one of our initiatives this year is to have a pastoral staff member to provide shepherding and oversight for the folks who attend each particular service...
 - Dutton – 8
 - Folden – 9:30
 - Aucoin – 10:15
 - Green – 11:00 (in Hungary last Sunday—PD pinch hit for him)
- that's in addition to our deacon's care groups and ABF team leaders...on purpose we want to have multiple safety nets to try to be sure that we're providing resources to help every person who's attending our church grow in their walk with Christ...to feel and be connected to what the Lord is doing through our church family...
- that also sets us up to launch our fifth worship service Lord willing a little over a year from now when Faith West is completed...
- so I appreciate the work our service pastors did last week while I was teaching at WOL Bible Institute in Florida and our family was taking some vacation together...
- now, our verses this morning bring us to another one of those events that no one would have ever predicted...but this time it's not so much Jesus astonishing people as much as it is on a person astonishing Him...here's what I mean...

- read Luke 7:1-17

- Now, this is another example in the Bible where we could make the observation that the Bible is incredibly brief and selective...
 - yes, it's sufficient – it's all we need for life and godliness – but that doesn't mean it answers every question we might have...
 - for example, why would this Centurion – who was a soldier in charge of 100 other soldiers and in this case a Gentile, have given money to build a Jewish synagogue?...
 - and how was it that he had such a strong relationship with the Jewish elders that he was able to send them with a message to give to Jesus and they actually spoke highly on his behalf?...
 - then there's the issue of how it was that this man came to have the high view of Christ that he obviously held...where did he get that?...
 - along with the questions any time slavery comes up in the Bible---especially since in this text the word for slave is used to describe the person who was ill but so was the word that is used for son...

- there's also the questions that come up when you compare the parallel passage in Matthew 8...because in that passage the text says the Centurion came out and spoke to Jesus whereas in our text here in Luke it appears He didn't...
- so did the man change his mind and later come out and Luke didn't include that detail?...
- or was Matthew's point that the people came out representing the man like when the press secretary speaks we sometimes report that the "white house said" because that person's is speaking with the president's authority...
- the point is – there are all kinds of questions here that remain unanswered...because Luke is trying to drive home a central point to his friend Theophilus...about the importance of exercising biblical faith...it's as if he's saying – do you see this man Theophilus?...you need to be like him...
 - and it's a really short walk to how that applies to us, isn't it?...
 - do you see this man...Christian man or woman in our day and age...you need to be like him...
- so we're talking about Building Core Strength by Practicing Astonishing Faith...
- with the time we have remaining, let's look for **3 principles to help us follow the Lord in a way that honors Him and impacts others.**

I. Astonishing Faith is Built on the Foundation of a Proper View of Self.

- this is where what we're talking about this morning ties back to what our church family studied last week in the discussion of the Sermon on the Mount...

A. A central point in the Sermon on the Mount

- Jesus made comments about being poor in spirit, and hungering for the Lord and weeping over our sin...not because if we did those things we could earn our way to heaven...
- the point was very similar to that of the ten commandments...to convince human beings that it is impossible to meet God's righteous standards in our own strength...
- that's why the parallel account in Matthew includes this important summary...
- **Matthew 5:48 - Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect...**...meaning what?...that in and of ourselves, we're in trouble...
- and that became...

B. A major difference between the Gentile centurion and the Jewish elders.

- we can't help but see that emphasis in this passage...

1. The elders

- **Luke 7:4 - When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him;**
- now, on the one hand, you have to appreciate the fact that they are arguing on behalf of this Gentile soldier...
- so we'll give them credit for that...
- but the content of their argument demonstrates that they don't understand one of the central aspects of what Jesus had been teaching in the Sermon on the Mount...
- unless you are prepared to take the position that this man is perfect (Matt 5:48), he still falls short...
- there is a huge gap between – "he's a good person" to "he's a perfect person"...
- that's why Paul would later wrote.. **Romans 3:23 - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**...that is where an understanding of the gospel starts...you won't come to Christ in repentance and faith unless you understand the depth of your need...somewhat ironically, the Centurion understood that...

2. The Centurion

- Luke 7:6-7 - Now Jesus *started* on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, “Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but *just say the word, and my servant will be healed.*”

- Do you see the point that Luke is trying to make to Theophilus?
- you have to have faith like this man...a willingness to humble yourself and be honest about the nature of your spiritual condition before a holy God...

C. Implications to those who do not yet know the Lord.

- it's great that we're having this conversation this close to Easter...because the death of Christ occurred because there was no other way for us to be reconciled to God...
- the point of the cross is that Jesus was dying for our sin...in our place...
- and it requires humility to admit that we need someone to do something for us...
- and I want to ask every person here this morning – have you come to place of being willing to make that admission?...
- are you like the Centurion who knew he wasn't worthy or like the elders who thought he was?...
- here's a great OT summary of exactly what we're discussing...
 - **Isaiah 53:6 - All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.**

D. Implications to those who have trusted Him.

- this same kind of humility is required to practice astonishing faith after you come to Christ...
- our argument isn't that we're perfect people, but that we have a perfect Savior...
- here's a couple of upshots of that...
 - I would encourage all of us to ask the Lord to give to the ability to continue evaluate ourselves biblically, especially if He allows us to continue to grow...
 - just like individuals, it's possible for a church to get a bit big for its corporate britches...and we need to constantly guard against that...
 - In his book *The Integrity Crisis*, Warren Wiersbe said that one of the biggest mistakes a person in ministry can make is to start believing his own press clippings...
 - **Isaiah 42:8 - “I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.**
- so right around Easter would be a marvelous time for us to be reminded of how any of our accomplishments are because of His grace, not our inherent worthiness...
- this also may be one of the reasons that the Lord designed the sanctification (growth) process...to be just that...a process...
 - why does God allow us to continue to struggle with indwelling sin?...
 - why isn't it faster and easier?...
 - perhaps for the same reason?...to give us an opportunity to be like the Centurion...even as we continue to grow in Christ?...

- recognizing this is what helps us focus on the gospel indicatives...on who we are in Christ...not all the things we can do...and certainly not do perfectly...
- and when we have that in place, we can be honest about the nature and intensity of the struggle...
- that's what Paul did in Romans 6, 7, and 8...
 - he laid out what it means to be in Christ...to have our identity in Him...not our own strength or righteousness...and then he could authentically say...
- **Romans 7:19 - For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.**
- how could Paul make an acknowledgement like that..."in print" so to speak and send it off to the churches...some of whom were questioning his qualifications to be an apostle...
- the answer is because he was more like the Centurion and less like the elders...
- that's why he could summarize that part of the discussion a few verses later...
 - **Romans 7:24 - Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?**
 - doesn't that sound like something the Centurion would have said?...but that's what freed him to place his focus on / and his confidence in His Savior...
 - **Romans 7:25 - Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.**
- so, Astonishing Faith is Built on the Foundation of a Proper View of Self...
- the question there is pretty straightforward, isn't it?...have you adopted a biblical view of self that motivates you to run toward the Lord for the strength and wisdom you need to serve Him?...
- now, what's the second clear emphasis (yes, as we said at the beginning – there are a lot of unanswered questions here – it's a very brief account – but that makes the key points crystal clear...)

II. Astonishing Faith Understands the Power and Authority of Christ.

A. Note the Centurion's confidence in Jesus' words.

- one of the phrases in this passage that comes screaming out is...
- **Luke 7:7 - for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but *just* say the word, and my servant will be healed.**
- isn't that amazing?...you don't even have to come and meet my servant...or see the nature of his disease...be sure you're in the right home...
- I'm mentioned this several times this year – please keep in mind that Luke was a doctor...you can just imagine his amazement at what was unfolding here...

B. The central issue was Christ's authority.

- the example this man gave to explain his belief was amazing...
- **Luke 7:8 - "For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."**
- now, please note his logic carefully...he didn't start by saying, I am a man in authority...he said – I am a man under authority...

- he doesn't take that any further...but it may very well be an acknowledgement that he believes Jesus was sent from God the Father...
- like the apostle John recorded...
- **John 5:30 - I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.**

- so just like the Centurion, Jesus was under authority...theologically we refer to that as the economic trinity...Jesus being 100% God, and the Holy Spirit being 100% God...yet still having submission within the various persons of the godhead...The Father sent the Son...the Son the Spirit..

- and this man got that...

- Jesus was under authority...and Jesus possessed authority...and he didn't even have to go to the house in order for the servant to be healed...
- that is astonishing faith...
- the man said – just like I tell one soldier go, and he goes...and to another come, and he comes...I have that much confidence in the authority of your word...

- let's start turning that around...

C. For people like you and me.

- is God calling on you right now to exercise astonishing faith?...
- I wouldn't be surprised at all if He was...

1. In times of crisis

- there will be men and women listening to this message today and the truth of the matter is that you feel like you're in a whirlwind right now...
- and the great thing is – in a number of cases in our church family, people are allowing the Lord to build into them, astonishing faith...
- and they would say – what's sustaining me is the powerful Word of God...
- I know the Lord could totally still this storm today if He wanted to...I don't know if He will – but I know that He can...and I'm going to quietly trust Him...

- **Proverbs 3:5-6 - Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.**

- for others...

2. In times of waiting

- you're in a tight spot...
- and at this point you're not sure how it's all going to work out...
- but you believe this – “all Jesus would have to do is say it...”
- there's core strength that comes from that...
- **Isaiah 40:31 - Yet those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up *with* wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.**

3. In times of service

- let's make it very direct for a moment...
- what does astonishing faith look like as we work on the Passion Play together?...

- for some, it's already been at work...because this year we have a brand new script and a brand new set and loads of new music...
- which means that people have been serving with Centurion like faith...
- **Psalm 100:2 - Serve the LORD with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing.**
- and if come across someone today or in the coming weeks who is serving on the front lines of ministry in the Passion Play, please take a minute and thank them for their example of astonishing faith...
 - because if you asked them – do you really believe anything could come of this – they'll say – absolutely – all Jesus has to do is say the Word...
- I would also encourage you to use this as an opportunity to invite those you know...
 - we use tickets to be sure we have enough seats, but they're free...
 - there are 4 performances this year – one on Thursday evening at 7, another Friday evening at 7, and two on Saturday at 2 and 6 (Easter weekend, April 5-7)
 - why not be like Centurion...astonish your friends by speaking up for Christ, believing that He can make an eternal difference in their lives just like He's made in yours...
- there are still other opportunities to serve – set-up/tear down – children's choir assistance, costume distribution – complete the form in your bulletin or go on-line...
- let's also be sure to bathe this ministry in prayer...
 - safety for those participating...
 - that the message would be clear...
 - that those who attend would be sensitive and responsive to the work of the Holy Spirit on their hearts
 - that God would be glorified by our efforts...
- could check out a recent blog post...

III. Astonishing Faith can Greatly Honor the Lord

Luke 7:9 - Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith."