

Amazing Faith
Luke 7:1-10
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There are 10 verses in our story. Let's read them all and then go back and unpack them.

Luke says, "Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, 'for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.' Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, 'Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, having 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.' When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, 'I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!' And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick."

In Hebrews 11:6, the writer of Hebrews says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

The Christian life is a life of faith. We are saved by grace through faith, we are sustained by faith in God and one day, by faith, we will be face-to-face with Him in heaven. The Christian life is salvation, sanctification and one day our glorification will be in the presence of the Lord—it's all by faith. Habakkuk 2:4 says, "The just shall live by his faith." Three times that is repeated in the New Testament.

So "Without faith it is impossible to please" God. Without faith it is impossible to be rewarded by God. So if we are going to come to God, if we are going to please God, if we are going to be rewarded by God, we must have faith.

This story is a story about faith. In verse 9, Jesus "marveled" about the man who had great, mega faith. His faith delighted and brought gladness and surprise to the heart of Jesus. He marveled that this man, being a Gentile, a Roman soldier and not Jewish, had so much faith.

This story breaks up into four sections. It is somewhat hard to outline, because it is one narrative. We'll go back and look at each section, verse-by-verse and phrase by phrase. The parallel story is in Matthew 8:5-13, so it appears twice in the Gospels. Matthew's version is fuller, and Luke's version is abbreviated. But they are the same story in the synoptic Gospels.

First, in verses 1-2, we have the context of this man's amazing faith. "Now when he had ended all His sayings..." is a reference to Jesus, who had just given the Sermon on the Plain. In Luke 6:17-49, Jesus had given what Matthew called the Sermon on the Mount. In Luke, it's called the Sermon on the Plain. "...in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum." And after Jesus had finished His Sermon on the Plain to the people, He went into the city of Capernaum. It is on the northwest corner of the Sea of Galilee. In the area of the Sea of Galilee was where Jesus had started His public ministry, and He made His headquarters in Capernaum.

Verse 2, "And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him was sick and ready to die." There was a centurion in that city who had a servant, bondsman or "doulos," verse 2, and this servant was "dear to him" but "was sick and ready to die."

Who is this Centurion? A Centurion is a captain of the Roman soldiers in numbers of 100s. It would mean he was in leadership over 100 soldiers. As a soldier in the Roman army, he was a Gentile. We'll see what a miracle it was that this Gentile, this Roman Centurion, a man of influence and wealth who came out of paganism, actually became a believer in Jesus Christ and had his servant healed.

Now we move, secondly, to the content of his amazing faith, in verses 3-8. "So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant." What we find here is the essence of the man's faith. And it's the same essence of our faith. The Bible says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). So we must be properly related to the Word of God to have faith in God.

You say, "Well, where does it say 'the word of God' in our text?" Verse 3 says the centurion "heard about Jesus." This was probably verbally transmitted to him. It doesn't say that he saw Jesus. It doesn't say he saw Him heal anyone. But he "heard." He heard the story of Jesus' miracles. Jesus had performed many other miracles in Capernaum, and he heard those stories. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

This centurion was a Gentile, but he was most likely known as a "God-fearer." What does that mean? It was a title given to Gentiles who believed in the God of Israel. So he became monotheistic. But God-fearers didn't fully proselytize into Judaism by circumcision and keeping the Mosaic law. So he didn't become a Jew. He remained a Gentile but believed in the God of Israel. He abandoned his pagan beliefs and then believed in the one, true God of Israel, and he was sympathetic to the Jewish people so much so that he loved them and built them a synagogue.

His faith rested on verse 3: the word of Jesus' miracles. But our faith rests on the Scriptures, the Word of God. There is nothing more important than your view of the Bible. Why? Because the Bible is the primary way God reveals Himself to mankind. If you have a low view of Scripture—you believe it's not inspired by God, you don't believe it's inerrant, you don't believe it's infallible, you believe it's not clear and is open to interpretation—then you'll have a low view of God and the things of God. So you must be properly related to the Bible.

I'm absolutely convinced that there is nothing more important for a Christian than to have a high view of Scripture. Especially for a pastor, who is preaching from the Bible. It's essential for the pastor to believe the Bible's the Word of God. I have to listen for only a few minutes to a preacher in order to tell what his view of Scripture is by the way he interprets it.

I believe the Bible is given by divine inspiration; it's God breathed. I believe it's infallible, inerrant and I believe in its clarity. God said what He meant and meant what He said. He never stuttered. We can understand the Bible. And I believe in its sufficiency, as well.

So this centurion heard Jesus; thus he believed in Him. We're going to see he called Him "Lord," he said that Jesus had the authority to heal his servant without even coming to his house, "But say the word, and my servant will be healed." So the essence of his amazing faith is his view of Jesus.

And we see his sincerity, in verses 4-5. "And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying..." notice the three things "...that the one..." referring to the centurion "...for whom He should do this was deserving, 'for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.'" He was deserving, loved Israel and built a synagogue. This is one of the reasons why he seemed to be a God-fearer: he believed in the God of Israel.

He was a Gentile, a Roman soldier, there was animosity between Gentiles and Jews, but there was added animosity against the Romans, because they had taken over the land of Israel and subjugated them. There was this hostility. But this man had love, care and compassion for the nation of Israel. Then notice the Jewish elders pleaded for him, verse 4, because he was worthy. He loved the nation and built a synagogue.

Many times people come to God based on what they think is their own worthiness or righteousness. The Bible is very clear that "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). And it says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

So anyone who claims, "I'm worthy; You should answer my prayer. I'm a good person; I give tithes, I'm baptized, I go to church and do these good deeds," they're approaching God on the wrong basis. They're appealing to their worthiness, their goodness, but that's not how we approach God. Anyone who approaches God must approach Him based on an awareness of their own sinfulness and unworthiness. "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." We don't come pleading our goodness, and we don't come pleading our righteousness.

That was the positive Jewish elders' opinion of this centurion. But his opinion of himself, which was the most important opinion to have, was that he was not worthy. They said that he was worthy, but he said he wasn't worthy. And the reason why Jesus responded to the centurion was because this man realized he was unworthy to have Jesus come to his house. He could also be thinking that he was a Gentile and Jesus was a Jew, and no Jew would want to come into the home of a Gentile; that would ceremoniously defile Jesus. So this man was wealthy

and loved the people of Israel, but no one comes to Christ based on their own goodness or righteousness.

And notice this man's humility, verses 6-7. "Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, 'Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.'" He felt his unworthiness. He built his hope on the goodness and power of Jesus and not on his righteousness. So should we.

There is nothing more important for you to know than what the Bible says about God and about yourself; that "I'm a sinner and lost without God's grace. I must come humbly and broken before Him."

So we see faith's essence, faith's sincerity and faith's humility. And at the end of verse 7 and verse 8, we see faith's dependence. "But say the word, and my servant will be healed." He saw Jesus as Lord and Savior. "For I also am a man placed under authority, having 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."

This is what made Jesus marvel. He said that he was given authority and can tell a soldier what to do, and Jesus also was given authority from His Father in heaven. So Jesus didn't have to go to the centurion's house; He just had to speak the word. This man put his absolute dependence and trust in Jesus Christ's power and authority. I like that.

In Hebrews 11:1, it says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen. It gives us the assurance about things we cannot see.

What do you need today to put your hope in? Jesus Christ. I like the song that goes:

"My hope is built on nothing less

Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame,

But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;

All other ground is sinking sand."

What are you pleading? What are you hoping in? What do you need to believe God for? Ask God for? Maybe a healing to your body? It seems like so often lately someone has cancer,

some incurable disease, somebody died of some tragedy. What darkness, what difficulty, what discouragement, what danger are you facing right now where you need to just say, “Lord, I’m going to trust you.”

This man fixed his eyes on Jesus. We need to fix our hope and eyes on Jesus Christ. That’s what it means to live by faith. We don’t trust in our goodness or righteousness; we fix our hope and eyes on Jesus Christ alone. In verse 8, he is looking to Jesus, trusting in Jesus, and we need to do the same.

Maybe your marriage is struggling right now. You need to trust the Lord to help. You need to pray. “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). You need to look to Him, cling to Him and trust Him.

Now we move from the context and content of this amazing faith to, thirdly, the commendation. This is the real point of the story. Verse 9, “When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, ‘I say to you, I have not found such great...’ or “mega” ...faith, not even in Israel.”

There are only two recorded times when Jesus “marveled.” The first was in Nazareth at the unbelief of the Jewish people. The second time was in Capernaum when he marveled at the belief of a Gentile. So where you think you would find faith in Nazareth, He marveled at their unbelief. Then in Capernaum in this Roman centurion, who you would think had no faith, He found faith. So Jesus marveled.

As I was studying this passage this week, I was struck that there are some who foolishly felt that because Jesus marveled at this man’s faith, that He wasn’t really God, because God doesn’t marvel. What?! What we learn here is that Jesus is fully man and fully God. When you study the life of Christ, you can get confused sometimes, because you see Jesus tired and God doesn’t get tired. You see Jesus thirsty and God doesn’t get thirsty. And you see Jesus weeping. This is Jesus’ humanity. When Jesus marvels, He marvels in His humanity; not in His deity. It is just as heretical to deny the true, real humanity of Jesus as it is to deny His true, real deity. So He is marveling at this man’s faith.

Let me give you some reasons why his faith is such a marvel. Number one, remember his background; he is a Gentile. Number two, he is a Roman soldier. He is a captain over other soldiers. He is a man who is in a position of power and authority. Number three, he had wealth; verse 5 says he built a synagogue. Number four, he has certainty; if Jesus just speaks the word, his servant would be healed.

“We find the choicest flowers blossoming where we least expect them.” The light shines the brightest in the darkness. Sometimes we get the idea that the world is getting so dark, the culture is getting so bad and evil—it is—that we can’t make an impact for God, but that just means we can shine that much brighter for God. The darker the world gets, the brighter our light can shine. And the darker the world gets, the more we must trust in God, put our faith in

God and believe in God, because God will not let us be disappointed. He will not let us down. The Bible says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him..." that's faith "...and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). He'll make your paths straight. It's so important to put your faith in God.

So whatever you're dealing with right now, whatever darkness you're going through—maybe it's discouragement or depression—never doubt in the dark what God has spoken in the light. Trust Him, rest in Him, hope in Him, look to Him. He won't let you down or be disappointed.

When Jesus said, "I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel," Matthew records something that Luke omits. In Matthew 8:11-12, Jesus gave a sermon at this point. "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." So he is saying that Gentiles will come into the kingdom. Jews didn't believe that; they didn't believe that any Gentile could be saved. "But the sons of the kingdom..." referring to the Jews of His generation "...will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

There is a parallel in this story with Acts 10, when Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was visited by an angel to send word to Peter to come to him and bring him all the words of life. Peter showed up and said that God told him not to call anything common or unclean, saying Gentiles could be saved. God then saved these Gentiles, which blew the minds of the Jews.

Can you imagine some guy comes to your house to share the Gospel and says, "I'm not supposed to be here, because you're all unclean. God bless you anyway. What do you want to know?" He then shares the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit falls on them! They all get saved and speak in tongues and get filled with the Spirit. What a marvelous thing that was!

This story is the beginning of seeing the fact that Jesus came to save even Gentiles. But many Jews will be shut out because of unbelief. This doesn't mean He is going to get rid of the Jewish people; He still made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that He must keep. He's not done with Israel as a nation. But it means because of their rejection of Messiah, the door swings open for all Gentiles to come in. Luke's Gospel is a universal Gospel, so it is showing us here that the Gentiles can come and be saved and spend eternity with God in heaven.

So this Gentile, this pagan, had such great faith that Jesus marveled at his faith. Salvation is for everyone. It's not race, it's grace. Salvation is by God's grace, Ephesians 2:8-9. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Some who we think will be saved will be lost.

Now fourth and last, we see the consequences of this amazing faith, in verse 10. "And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick." In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said, "According to your faith let it be to you" (Matthew 9:29). Then the centurion went back to his house.

If you piece both the Matthew and Luke stories together, what happened was that the centurion

sent a Jewish delegation to Jesus. I doubt he told them to tell Jesus, "I'm worthy, I love Israel and don't forget I built you guys a synagogue!" I don't think they told Jesus that. And by the way, Jesus was not impressed. But after the Jewish delegation, the centurion sent some others from his house, and he most likely went with them to Jesus and stood in the background. Then he dialogued with the Lord Himself and said, "I'm not worthy." Matthew's Gospel indicates that the centurion went himself. So it was a combination of both; he sent the delegation and he went himself, or this is a reference that he went in proxy by sending the last delegation. Needless to say, he got what he wanted from the Lord; his servant was healed.

I was struck by the fact that this Gentile, this Roman soldier, cared about his servant, his slave. We hear so much about slavery today and in the ancient world. This Roman centurion loved and cared for his *doulos*, his slave. In speaking to the Lord using the word "servant," he used a unique, Greek word that can be translated—and is in some translations—"my son." So this servant was very dear to him.

Then Jesus was willing to take time out of His busy schedule to go to a Gentile soldier's house to heal his servant. We see all this compassion in this story. But Jesus is also the Lord of distance; He didn't need to go to the centurion's house in order to heal the servant. He didn't need to spit in the dirt, make mud and put it on the servant's eyes. He didn't need to touch him or lay hands on him. He could just speak the word, and the servant could be healed from a great distance. And when the delegation returned, they found the servant had been healed from the very hour Jesus spoke it.

God always answers prayer. But He doesn't always answer prayers the way we want Him to. I've had people say to me, "God doesn't answer prayers!"

I say, "Yes, He does. He said 'No.'"

"Well, that's not the answer I want!"

"He answered you; didn't He?"

If you really trust God, if you really have faith in God, you'll say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

We'll never understand His ways. We'll never understand why this person gets sick or this person dies or this person has these problems. "Why, God?" But we can trust Him.

I like Psalm 23, which says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters." He takes me through "the valley of the shadow of death....You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." That's the life of faith.

He's your shepherd and you're a sheep. Sheep are very dumb, by the way, so we need a shepherd. We worry about the future. "Will my health give way? Will there be money to pay the bills? What will happen to me in my old age?" We worry about our marriages, our finances, our health. We worry about our children and our grandchildren.

Trust in the Lord. Put your faith in the Lord. Put your hope in the Lord.