

The Faith of the Centurion, Part 3

Luke 7:6-10

Luke 7:1 through 10 is the text. "After he," Jesus, "had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, 'He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.'

"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. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. 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.'

“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.” And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.”

We started last time with the first point in our outline: the surprising situation. Jesus entered Capernaum after completing his teaching, the Sermon the Mount. He was summoned to the home of a certain centurion because the centurion, verse 2, “he had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him,” or as we mentioned last time, the slave was very dear to the centurion.

The centurion is known as one who loved people, even this lowly slave. But the centurion didn’t think of the sick and dying man in, in merely utilitarian terms as a slave, a useful tool, like Aristotle did; just a living animate tool useful means for increasing productivity. This man, the centurion, spoke of this slave as his child, which is the original, what the original conveys in verse 7.

The slave is very likely the centurion’s personal attendant, and under similar circumstances throughout the entire Roman Empire, which had millions of slaves like this and thousands of personal attendants, a sick and dying slave would

have simply been replaced by a healthier model. But this centurion isn't like that. He cares for this slave. He sees him as a human being. He sees him as created in the image of God and worth saving. Not just worth saving from death, but worth relieving of his suffering and his pain, preserving his life. It's a mark of the centurion's love and compassion.

And so, the centurion sends a delegation to Jesus, entreating the Lord for mercy, that's verse 3, second point in our outline. It should all be written in your bulletin, by the way. This second point is: the bold question. It says, "When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant."

We talked about, last time, how the centurion had been hearing about Jesus, very likely since the days of John the Baptist. Soldiers, who were in the service of Herod Antipas, as this centurion probably was as well, were probably stationed at the palace in Tiberius and attended John's baptisms, not far away. Heard about repentance. They'd heard about a coming Messiah, one who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit.

Centurion probably also heard about the nobleman, the, roll, royal official in John 4:46 to 53; how Jesus had healed that man's son and with just a word. Jesus wasn't even

physically present to touch that boy's body. That power is a power that transcends space. So, this centurion, you know, he's been around. He's familiar with the kind of power that exists in this material world, and this centurion knew this is not human power. This is divine.

This is something completely different. Not only that, but the centurion sees that this is power that's used very differently than he'd ever seen. He was very familiar, with power of men. He was actually at the pointy end of the spear in the Roman army. He is there to destroy, use power to subdue, use power to make people line up to submit to the, to the will, and the might of Rome.

This power, the power that Jesus possessed is being used for kindness, for mercy, for the good of people. It's an extension of compassion, and it's given freely. It's given without charge. It expects nothing in return. So having heard of this Jesus, of this power, and that Jesus had just returned to Capernaum, the centurion pounces on the opportunity.

He sends the Jewish elders to make his appeal, very surprising, by the way, that these Jewish elders act as the centurion's emissaries. They are not acting here at all under

compulsion. They're not conscripted into service. They're not pressed into this. They go willingly. They go eagerly.

And that's what we see in verses 4 to 5; point number three: Their persuasive petition. Persuasive petition, verses 4 to 5, "When they came to Jesus, they pleaded", or, the, the verb tense there is imperfect, they kept on pleading with him "earnestly, saying, 'He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.'" Now, if we can set aside, for a moment that, what we talked about last time, that give to get ethic on the part of the Jewish elders, their, their, they had a works oriented, merit-based mindset.

We saw last time that the Jewish elders, they weren't wrong here to emphasize and commend the centurion's character. I mean, here is a soldier, a Roman soldier, in the service of Herod Antipas. He's representing the hated, the despised, Roman occupation. He's actually the leader of everything they hate. He's the leader of the Gerasenes stationed at Capernaum. He's there to uphold law and order, yes. He's there to keep the peace, yes. But it's all for the greater purpose of securing Herod's tax revenues, which are Rome's tax revenues.

All the money syphoned out of Galilee eventually lands in Rome's pockets, and that just funds the very occupation, the very thing they hate. These Jewish elders, this landed nobility, and as Galilean elders, very likely belonging to the Pharisee party, they're fastidious about Jewish national identity, holding fast to the traditions of their fathers. They're not only willing to set that aside for this case, but they do so eagerly. They're persistently advocating for the centurion's cause. Why would they do that?

It all comes back to the powerful, irrefutable testimony of love. That's what Jesus commanded in the Sermon on the Mount. The centurion loved people and it was a true love, a sacrificial love, a generous love, a love that can't be denied, a love that is not found on earth, but only comes from heaven and he loved the nation as a whole. He loved these people in particular. The testimony of the elders is, that this synagogue he himself has built for us. That's their testimony, not his. That is, using his own personal funds; paying for the whole project.

The centurion, and the centurion alone was responsible for the building of the synagogue that they all attended; where their families were raised, instructed in the word of God, where their community met, where they rejoiced in Jewish tradition, in

the tradition of their fathers, where they perpetuated Jewish religion, Jewish culture, and the Scriptures, and the centurion made it all happen.

The centurion's patronage is generous, and sacrificial, and kind. Where did that kind of love come from? It had to be through exposure to the scriptures, which is why building a synagogue, in particular, is important. It's just not building a roadway. It's not building a public bathhouse. It's not building a, even as good as a house of prayer. It's a synagogue.

This man wanted to know the God of Israel. He had, come to, become a God-fearing Gentile and since the synagogue is where the Torah was read, it's where the prophets were expounded, he funded it. He wanted to see it built for the sake of and the good of the whole town. Where did that interest in scripture come from? Did he generate it all on his own? No. How did this appetite for God's word develop? Where was the seed planted?

How was the Bible being illuminated to him? Well, by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. As J.C. Ryle put it, "There's only one way to account for the centurion's character. The character was what he was by the grace of God. The Spirit had opened the eyes of this understanding and put a new heart

within him.” That’s exactly right, and that’s exactly what’s happened to all of us.

That’s why we have an interest in God’s word. That’s why we love it. That’s why we want to hear it taught and expounded and explained to us. That’s why we love it and want to obey it. That’s why we want to put it into practice in our lives. That’s why we want, we want to get everything else in our life out of the way, so we can understand and know this, that we might obey it, that we might be pleasing to him because his wisdom is precious to us. That all comes by the regenerating power of the Spirit.

And so, it says, the beginning or verse 6, “Jesus went with them.” He went with them. Why wouldn’t he? I’d imagine he was intrigued. He did give priority to, his, in his messianic mission to the Jewish nation, and yet there was no racial prejudice in Jesus. Here you see that clearly portrayed. He’s eager to grant the centurion his request. Not only for his own sake, for the centurion’s sake, but out of concern for this sick and dying slave. Such kindness on behalf of the Lord.

Here’s where we come to a rather curious turn, though, in the narrative. I want to draw your attention to it in the fourth point in your outline: The Believing Supplication. The Believing



Supplication. It says in verse, verses 6 and 7, "When he was not far," when Jesus 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.'"

Interesting. The Jews said, "He is worthy"; he says of himself, "I am not worthy." Quite the contrast in perspective, wouldn't you say? And now we begin to see, in addition to his remarkable kindness, in addition to remarkable love, we start to see a remarkable humility. Humility. "Lord, don't trouble yourself." Don't trouble yourself, I'm not worthy. "I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you." He says in verse 7.

Look, that's how, right there, that's how believers pray. This is how believers come before God. This is how Christians entreat God. Right? They enter into God's presence in humility. They recognize who they are in light of who God is.

The centurion came from a, a pagan background, raised in all the filth of a pagan society. We understand that. He'd served many, many years as a soldier. No doubt he had said and done things that he was ashamed of. His thought life had been polluted. He was haunted by things that he could still remember and so this holy one approaching his door creates a contrast for

him, a stark contrast that he sensed, between the holiness of Jesus and his own unholiness, his own unworthiness.

No wonder he sent a second delegation of friends, of course he would. This man had to feel like Isaiah in the presence of God, "Woe is me! For I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips, I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." And the centurion adds, not just my lips, but my hands, and my feet, and my eyes, and my mind, everything about me is unworthy. The centurion is mortified to think that Jesus himself, the one he's rightly identified here as Lord, would cross his threshold, would come underneath his roof, when he himself is so unworthy, and it just caused him to tremble.

So, he sent the second delegation lest Jesus, the Lord, come into the presence of this unworthy sinner. Again, just pause there for a moment to reflect. Do you think of yourself that way, as unworthy? As we read earlier in Psalm 130:3, "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" There's a healthy sense of humility in that attitude, which causes us to feel meek, not entitled, not deserving, not to make demands.

When we sense our unworthiness, we bow in humble gratitude. It's not groveling. It's not licking the dust. It's

just a healthy sense of the fear of the Lord, which recognizes that what we can easily lose sight of; we have been rescued by Christ from divine judgment. We've been delivered from condemnation, which we thoroughly deserve.

What's seen and known by others on the outside, oh, that isn't even the half of it. What is known by us in our minds, oh, that isn't even the half of it. It goes deep; the depravity goes deep. We're rightly condemned. We're rightly deserving of divine judgment, and yet we've escaped wrath. We've escaped eternal punishment, due for our own sins.

That's the attitude of the centurion: humility. Another mark of believing. Supplication modeled by this centurion is that in spite of our unworthiness, we still seek Jesus anyway. As, th, Peter had once voiced for the rest of the apostles, "Lord, You have the words of eternal life, where shall we go?" The end of verse 7, but, strong contrast there. You might read it this way, "But" or in spite of my unworthiness, look just "say the word, let my servant be healed."

It doesn't come across as much in the English translations, but now that we've explained the apparent reversal of invitation, centurion returns to his original request, and he says, "But say the word and let my servant be healed." In the

original, it's, it's clear. It sounds like military language, almost. Just, just give the order, sir, and it'll happen; my child will be healed. As if to say: No doubt in my mind. You just say the word, it's gonna be done.

So, he's rightly humble, and yet at the same time, what seems like a contrast, but really isn't for any believer, he's also very enthusiastic. He truly believes. And the reason for his confidence, it's there in verse 8. That verse there shows the depth of his understanding.

Instructed by faith, of who Jesus really is, of how Jesus can truly accomplish this work of healing and, get this, without being present, without being physically there. Verse 8, "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.'" "

The centurion there is arguing from the lesser to the greater, from himself to Christ. He operates every day on the premise that he himself has been assigned a certain rank. He possesses a certain degree of authority. He's placed there by people greater than him, in a chain of command.

So if he, just a lowly centurion in the cosmic chain of command, if he can issue commands and expect them to be obeyed,

knowing that they are obeyed, how much more Jesus? He who has power over disease, over demons, over life and death itself. He has the authority and the prerogative to command them all. And he can issue commands for those who come to him in faith, if he wants to.

He can command from near or far, because his authority obviously transcends distances. It crosses all boundaries. It overcomes all obstacles, and the question is: Is it his will to grant my request? Is it his will? Jesus had done it before; healed the nobleman's son, John 4:50, Jesus said, "Go, your son will live." And that boy was healed at that very moment. All it took was a word. Done. So, if happened then, why not now? That's his reasoning.

And that is the reasoning of all Christians who come to God in prayer. We come to a sovereign God. One who has authority and command of all things, one who does his will and, com, accomplishes all his good pleasure. And that is why we can come to him and pray. Because if you don't believe God is absolutely sovereign, why pray to him? Why ask him for anything, if he's not absolutely sovereign. If he can't command disease and death. If he can't command demons. If he can't take care of things,

like petty things, like finances, things we all struggle with, right? Things we're anxious over.

If God isn't absolutely sovereign, doesn't have the power over your checkbook, doesn't have the power over your bank account, doesn't have the power over your health, doesn't have the power, of, over your relationships, why pray? We believe he's sovereign. We believe he is all powerful. We believe his heart, is, is always been toward good. We believe he is all wise.

And so, when we pray. We don't pray, my will be done. No. Thy will be done, because your will is best. And if you choose to withhold this thing I ask for, it's because you're wise. You know better than I do. What am I, but a child, and an unworthy child, before you. I can't see all your goodwill. I can't see all your eternal decree. I trust you. I trust you. That's how Christians, who come to God in prayer, think. So, with the believing supplication, it got Jesus' attention. He's willing. He comes. He wants to do. He wants to heal. And it becomes for him a providentially timed teaching opportunity.