

FAITH OF A CENTURION

Unifying Topic: The Measure of Faith

- I. The Appeal For Jesus (Luke 7:1-5)
- II. Confidence in the Lord's Authority (Luke 7:6-8)
- III. An Example of Great Faith (Luke 7:9-10)

Introduction:

After Jesus' famous sermon (6:17-49), He goes to Capernaum where He encounters a delegation sent by a Roman centurion. The official is requesting Jesus' healing of a servant. Although the Jewish people didn't much care for the Romans as a whole, this particular man is an exception. Not only has the centurion shown respect for the Jewish nation and helped with the construction of a synagogue, he also values his servant who is sick—a servant who might very well be Jewish (7:2-5).

There are some differences between Luke's account of the centurion and that of Matthew. It is not difficult to conclude that the accounts in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10 are a record of the same incident. However, Luke's Gospel makes a point of telling us that the centurion never personally spoke with Jesus, while Matthew's account clearly gives us this impression. How, then, can we explain the apparent contradictions in these two accounts?

It would have been a reasonable explanation that Matthew understood that a delegation sent by this man was the same as the man himself coming to Jesus. But more importantly, we don't always need to feel an obligation to reconcile the differences between accounts, particularly when they are not central to the significance of the story. The Gospel writers were aware of the writings of others

(Luke 1:1-2), and yet they felt free to have differences in their accounts—perhaps differences which remind us that we have only partial accounts of any incident in the life of Christ and that each is remembered differently by different people. That doesn't take away the value of understanding what Jesus did.

Context:

The physical context of today's lesson is the village of Capernaum (see also the parallel account in Matthew 8:5-13). It was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, a freshwater lake in northern Palestine. Bible students are accustomed to thinking of Jesus as being from Bethlehem (John 7:42; etc.) or from Nazareth (Matthew 2:23; etc.). But a case can also be made for the claim that he was from Capernaum because the village became something of a headquarters or base of operations for his preaching and teaching tours of Galilee (4:13; Mark 2:1); notice that Matthew 9:1 refers to Capernaum as Jesus' "own town."

The importance of Capernaum is seen in the fact that it is mentioned 16 times in the New Testament, in one instance quite negatively (Matthew 11:23 and parallel Luke 10:15). Five of Jesus' twelve disciples were residents of Capernaum when Jesus called them to follow him: four fishermen (James, John, Peter, and Andrew; see Matthew 4:18-22) and one tax collector (Matthew, also known as Levi; see Mark 2:14).

Although Capernaum probably did not have more than a few hundred residents, it was a thriving regional hub for at least three reasons. First, the fishing industry provided steady income for many families. The lake was productive, with one account telling of a haul of 153 large fish (John 21:11).

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Fishing businesses like that of the Zebedee family (Mark 1:19–20) would have caught more fish than could be sold locally. So some fish were preserved with salt and sent to larger cities such as Jerusalem.

Second, Capernaum was situated on the main road from Damascus into the region. This location made it a good place for the Romans to set up points for tax collectors to assess tolls on goods passing into the area. Matthew worked for the Romans this way, maintaining a tax-collecting booth on this road (Luke 5:27). Jewish tax collectors from Jerusalem also operated out of Capernaum to collect the annual temple tax from the Jews of Galilee (Matthew 17:24).

Third, Capernaum was important enough to have had some Roman soldiers stationed there, as today's lesson reveals (compare Acts 10:1). The need to safeguard the tax money collected may have been the reason. It is possible they were under the authority of Herod Antipas, the Roman client "tetrarch" of the Galilee region from 4 BC to AD 39 (Luke 3:1).

Capernaum has been the site of some remarkable archaeological discoveries over the last hundred years. A lavish synagogue dating from the fourth century AD likely sat on a foundation floor from the time of Jesus. This place could be the location of the synagogue of Capernaum where Jesus taught (Mark 1:21). Also uncovered nearby is a large house that has become a Christian pilgrimage site. Evidence suggests this was the actual house of Simon Peter, a place where Jesus resided while in town (Luke 4:38).

Today's Lesson:

I. The Appeal For Jesus [Luke 7:1-5](#)(KJV)

¹ **Now when he had ended all his sayings**

in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.

² **And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.**

³ **And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.**

⁴ **And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this:**

⁵ **For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.**

Christ did many wonderful works in Capernaum, but the people of Capernaum did not respond well to His ministry and so later Christ severely condemned the city for their failure to honor spiritual privilege (Matthew 11:23).

The centurion, though a military man of Rome, had done much for Capernaum including building them a synagogue (Luke 7:5).

Several important things can be said about the person who was to experience a miracle recovery from Christ. **First**, the *function* of the person. "*Servant.*" The man was a lowly servant. But one does not have to be of high position in the world to have Christ work wonders on his behalf. **Second**, the *fondness* for the person. "*Centurion's servant, who was dear unto him*" (Luke 7:2). The centurion had much affection for him. Obviously the servant had done his work well. If your boss dislikes you, maybe it is because you do not do your job well.

The sickness is specified as paralysis in Matthew 8:6. **First**, the *perniciousness* of the problem. "*Sick, and ready to die.*" With paralysis involved, the sickness could be like our polio which is a very severe

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sickness. **Second**, the *peril* in the problem. “*Ready to die.*” This was a serious case indeed.

If you want Christ to help, you need to ask Him to help. The centurion sought help from Christ. He is the best one to seek in time of need. **First**, the *people* for the pursuit. “*He sent unto him the elders of the Jews*” (Luke 7:3). The centurion would not have difficulty getting these Jewish leaders to run an errand for the him, for he was a Roman officer and had built the synagogue for the Jews (Luke 7:5). **Second**, the *plea* in the pursuit. “*Beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant*” (Luke 7:3). The plea was earnest, but the elders put the stress on the bodily presence of Christ which later the centurion would also do. **Third**, the *praise* in the pursuit. “*He was worthy for whom he should do this; for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue*” (Luke 7:4,5). The elders were typical humans who sought favor from God through merit not mercy. The compliments of the centurion are, however, good ones— (1) compassion for the Jews (“*loveth our nation*”), not many folk love the Jews, and (2) contribution to the Jews (“*built us a synagogue*”).

The plea did not fall on deaf ears. Christ responded in a very positive way to the request to come and heal the servant. Christ responded immediately to the request. The centurion had a different tune to play than did the elders of the Jews. The centurion focused on his unworthiness whereas the elders of the Jews emphasized his worthiness. The centurion felt he was unworthy to come to Christ himself and unworthy to have Christ come to his home. When we see ourselves unworthy of the favors of God, we will open the door to His favors.

The centurion believed the word of Christ was so powerful it could heal the servant without Christ’s presence. To support his plea the centurion illustrated his own authority—his word could order soldiers under him to do as he said (Luke 7:8). It was a good illustration and showed the centurion’s great faith in the word of Christ.

Christ gave the centurion a very high commendation. Being commended by Christ is better than being commended by anyone else.

The humble attitude of the centurion and his faith in the word of Christ was so unusual that Christ marveled. Such an attitude would be just as rare today, for our day is especially given to braggadocio and the rejection of the Word of God. Faith and humility are inseparably associated.

The centurion’s faith in Christ’s word was that which chiefly arrested Christ’s attention. The humility of the centurion which was also impressive was simply a result of faith. People with faith walk humbly. God gets very excited about “*faith*” in Him and His Word. The world worships fame and fortune. God is impressed instead with “*faith.*” Faith is so important to God that “*without faith it is impossible to please him*” (Hebrews 11:6).

“*I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel*” (Luke 7:9). Where the faith should have been, it was not. Israel had the spiritual opportunities but did not have faith. The centurion was a Roman soldier, but he had great faith. Sometimes one will find great faith in God and His Word in surprising situations.

II Confidence in the Lord’s Authority
Luke 7:6-8(KJV)

⁶ Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the

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centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof:

⁷ Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.

⁸ For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

The plea did not fall on deaf ears. Christ responded in a very positive way to the request to come and heal the servant.

Christ responded immediately to the request. *“When he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof ... neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee”* (Luke 7:6,7). The centurion had a different tune to play than did the elders of the Jews. The centurion focused on his unworthiness whereas the elders of the Jews emphasized his worthiness. The centurion felt he was unworthy to come to Christ himself and unworthy to have Christ come to his home. When we see ourselves unworthy of the favors of God, we will open the door to His favors.

“Say in a word, and my servant shall be healed” (Luke 7:7). The centurion believed the word of Christ was so powerful it could heal the servant without Christ’s presence. To support his plea the centurion illustrated his own authority—his word could order soldiers under him to do as he said (Luke 7:8). It was a good illustration and showed the centurion’s great faith in the word of Christ.

III An Example of Great Faith [Luke 7:9-10\(KJV\)](#)

⁹ When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

¹⁰ And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

Scripture records only two occasions on which Jesus was “amazed” (Mark 6:6; Luke 7:9). What was it about the centurion that so amazed Jesus?

- **AMAZED**, a-māzd’: A term which illustrates the difficulty of expressing in one Eng. word the wide range of startled emotion, wonder, astonishment, awe, covered, in the OT, by four Heb words and in the NT by as many Gr words.

Faith is of tremendous importance in Luke-Acts. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus commends the faith of many persons, including: the men who carried a paralyzed man to Jesus (5:20), a Roman officer (7:9), a sinful woman (7:50), a hemorrhaging woman (8:48), a Samaritan leper (17:19), and a blind beggar (18:42). Jesus rebuked the disciples for lack of faith during the midst of a storm (8:25) and raised a searching question about whether the Son of Man would find faith on the earth when he returned (18:8). Later, the disciples themselves requested, “Show us how to increase our faith” (17:5). Out of genuine concern for Peter, Jesus pleaded in prayer for him that his faith should not fail (22:32). True faith is powerful and effective (17:6).

Similarly, faith plays a vital role in Acts (3:16; 4:4; 10:43; 11:21; 13:48; 14:1; 19:18). Stephen is “full of faith” (Acts 6:5); Barnabas is “strong in faith” (Acts 11:24). Numerous Gen om sin and turning to God, and of having faith in our Lord Jesus” (20:21). See also tiles exercise faith (e.g., Acts 14:9; 16:31–34). Young converts are

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“strengthened in their faith” (Acts 16:5). To sum up, Paul’s central message was “the necessity of repenting fr note on 1:45.