

The Faith of the Centurion

Luke 7:1-10 on September 14, 2025
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Please read Luke 7:1-10 before going further in this transcript.

This summer we took a break from our sermon series on the Gospel of Luke and did a number of topical sermons. These topics included everything from unity, to Evangelism, to Human Sexuality. This morning, we're returning to our series on Luke. We began this series last November, with Luke's explanation for why he wrote his Gospel, "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught." (Luke 1:1-4) Luke wants his readers to find assurance about the things they'd heard about Jesus. So, after careful investigation, he wrote down an orderly account for us.¹

In chapter 1 he writes about the foretelling of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. He records how John leaped in Elizabeth's womb when she heard Mary's voice. Then Luke records Mary's song, and John the Baptist's birth, and then his father Zechariah's song, (*after he got his voice back*).

Luke then records Jesus' birth in the classic Luke 2 Christmas story; the angel announces to the shepherds: "Don't be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." Jesus is presented at the temple and circumcised; then, words of prophesy are spoken over him by Simeon and Anna – this was no ordinary child, He would "cause the falling and rising of many in Israel." Luke then jumps ahead to 12-year-old Jesus at the temple, who amazed the teachers with His level of understanding. His earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, were frantic looking for Him, but He calmly replied, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

In chapter 3 Luke writes about John's ministry of a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, which prepared the way for Jesus' message of

¹ Right from the get-go, Luke is clear that his account is not the only account that is out there, his, is one among many. He doesn't clarify which other accounts he's referring to, but they most likely include both spoken and written accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus. You see, even though writing was quite common in the 1st century, it was also somewhat expensive. The spoken word was common in this culture, and it transmitted and recorded certain truths through storytelling and memorization. "Whatever type of narrative [NIV "account"] Luke alludes to in 1:1, it is not clear whether the sources are oral or written or both." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50, Baker Exegetical Commentary of the NT*, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 53.

repentance. And even though Jesus was Himself sinless, He asks John to baptize Him. The Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in the form of a dove, and His Heavenly Father declares from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” Luke then lists Jesus’ genealogy, which points not only to Jesus’ full humanity as a son of Adam, but also to His full divinity as the Son of God.

In chapter 4 Jesus is tested in the wilderness by the devil, and He stands firm on the Word of God. Jesus then officially launches His public ministry, and He’s rejected in His hometown of Nazareth. Nonetheless, He reads out Isaiah’s prophecy, and declares that He’s come to fulfill it in their hearing: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19) Jesus then clarifies that the Lord’s favor isn’t just for the Jews; it’s also for the Gentiles. His Jewish listeners respond to this by trying to throw Him off a cliff. Jesus then travels to other towns, demonstrating with His teaching that His words have authority, including His authority to cast out demons, and to heal various kinds of sickness.

In Luke 5, right after just about sinking their fishing boats with a miraculous catch of fish, Jesus calls some unlikely, simple fisherman to be His first official disciples. They leave everything to follow Jesus. Jesus continues His healing ministry, even going so far as to touch a leper with His own hands and make him clean, and to heal *and* to forgive a paralyzed man whose friends had lowered him through the roof. Jesus boldly declares before the religious leaders of His day, “But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” (Luke 5:24) Jesus then goes on to call a sinful tax collector named Matthew to follow Him: Jesus clarifies, “...It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:31-32)

After teaching His followers that the new wine of His ministry would require new wineskins, Jesus then declares Himself “Lord of the Sabbath” in Luke 6. And after a long night in prayer, He officially appoints His 12 Apostles. Jesus then goes on to deliver His “Sermon on the Plateau,” which is right where we wrapped up our series last May. Jesus began this sermon with a series of blessings/woes. He then taught about some of the distinctives of His Kingdom, such as...

- ...loving our enemies,
- ...taking the plank out of our own eye before judging others,
- ...recognizing a tree by its fruit, and

...how wise people build their house on the rock.
That brings us to Luke 7...

Luke 7:1 begins, "When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum." The phrase, "all this," is referring back to Luke 6, when Jesus had been delivering His Sermon on the Plateau. Once Jesus was done preaching, He then entered Capernaum, which was evidently a sizeable town just over and down from the plateau where He'd just preached.² Capernaum also happens to be the town where Peter and his wife had a house, which became an important base of operations during Jesus' ministry in the northern region of Galilee.³ This northern city of Capernaum, is the historical location for today's lesson on faith...

The faith of the centurion shows us that...

1) ...great faith can be found in any one of us.

Luke 7:2-3 says, "2 There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. 3 The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant."⁴ Now a centurion was a Roman soldier who had authority over a group of 100 fellow soldiers. Centurions were well paid, due to the level of responsibility and authority that came with their position. Some men used this position harshly, and for selfish gain, while others, like the one in today's story, used their position benevolently, for the watch-care and wellbeing those who were under their command, and within their jurisdiction. Apparently this centurion was quite a generous patron of Jewish interests within his vicinity. In fact, verse 5 later indicates that he not only contributed financially toward the synagogue, but he had it built, which may indicate that he paid for the whole thing. Be that as it may, this centurion was publicly respected for his support of its construction.⁵

His benevolent disposition is also demonstrated in his concern for one of his servants. It could just be that this slave was valuable, more in terms of being a trusted asset and a good employee, but the following verses, with their words of affirmation and descriptions of the centurion's humble

² "kuh PUHR nay uhm" W. Murray Severance and Terry Eddinger, *That's Easy for You to Say: Your Quick Guide to Pronouncing Bible Names* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 49.

³ Capernaum "was evidently a sizable town in Jesus' day. Peter's house there became a base of operations during his extended ministry in Galilee. (Mark 2:1; 9:33)." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1598 footnote on Matthew 4:13.

⁴ Back in Luke 4:27 Jesus reminded His listeners of the healing of Naaman the Syrian, a servant of the king. This anticipates the healing of the Centurion's servant in Luke 7. Luke 7:2 describes the centurion's servant: "whom his master valued highly." 2 Kings 5:1 describes the king's servant, Naaman, as, "a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded." See *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2085 footnote on Luke 7:1-8:21.

⁵ "Augustus saw synagogues as valuable, because they maintained order and morality." See discussion by Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 638 including footnote #8.

attitude, suggest something more. This slave seems to have been dear to the centurion on a more personal level.⁶

This centurion was a Gentile, and yet he's connected well enough with the Jewish elders that he can send them on his behalf to ask Jesus to come. And he's not only connected to these Jews, he's well-liked by them, so they advocate for him and speak fondly of him when they submit his request to Jesus. Now this may have just been a savvy move on the part of this centurion, "yeah, I'll send my *Jewish* associates to talk with this *Jewish* healer," but the following context again indicates something more: a high level of respect for Jesus.

Within the context of today's verses, we can't really be too sure about this centurion's personal faith in God. Yes, he asked Jesus for help, and he displayed great faith in Jesus' ability to heal, but it's unclear if he had *saving* faith, or if he was a genuinely devoted follower of God.

It seems fairly likely, that if he had been a genuine believer, that these Jewish elders would have then made that clear when they were making their earnest appeal to Jesus.⁷ Be that as it may, we do know that this centurion had heard and believed enough about Jesus, to become convinced that He had authority to heal. He demonstrated great faith...

...even though he was a Gentile,

...even though he may not have had saving faith (at least, not yet), and

...even though he had a lucrative job working for the Roman empire.

Great faith, can be found in any one of us, whatever unlikely ethnicity we might be, whatever level of saving faith we may or may not have yet expressed, and whatever socioeconomic situation we might be in. The faith of this centurion should cause us to reflect not only on our own faith today, but also the faith of the people around us. Some of the people we might deem unlikely to have faith, might just surprise us when it comes to placing faith in Jesus. The news about Jesus hadn't gone out just to the poor/outcasts; it had also spread to the wealthy/upwardly mobile, and to non-Jews, like this centurion. And it had resulted in at least a certain amount of faith within some of them.⁸ (*Who knows? Maybe this centurion did eventually come to saving faith, especially after witnessing his servant's miracle.*)

⁶ See discussion by Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 636.

⁷ Indeed, verse 5 says that he built their synagogue, but not that he worshipped at it with them. "Though it cannot be said for certain that he is a proselyte, it is possible that his support of the synagogue makes this conclusion tenable." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, pp. 635-636.

⁸ See discussion by Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, pp. 638-639.

The faith of the centurion also shows us that...

2) ...faith that Jesus commends contains both humility and reverence.

Luke 7:4-6 goes on, “4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, 5 because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” 6 So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.”

The contrast here between the Jewish elders’ assessment of the centurion’s deservedness, and the centurion’s own self-assessment of his own UNdeservedness is worth considering.⁹ All too often we humans buy into a transactional way of thinking about life, like these Jewish elders did, and all too often we Christ-followers let it bleed into the way we think about how we follow Jesus. Faith in Jesus is not about getting what we deserve, or about living a good enough life so that we’ve then earned good things that God is now obligated to give us. Yes God does reward His people, but that’s just because He’s so good to us, not because we’ve earned it or because God owes us. God treats us better than our sins deserve. Were it not for the goodness of God expressed through Jesus, we’d all get what we actually deserve, which is death and eternal separation from God.

So if we have any notion in our mind that certain people are more “deserving” of God’s blessing, based on their wealth or their good works or whatever else, then we need to think again; we need to irradicate that from our approach to faith. The God we serve does not show favoritism; not for this centurion, not for any pastor or president or dignitary or movie star, or whoever else.¹⁰ We all stand on equal footing as people made in God’s image, and subject to His perfectly sovereign will. Job 34:19 reminds us, “[God] shows no partiality to princes and does not favor the rich over the poor, for they are all the work of his hands.”

For some reason or another, the Roman centurion understood this.¹¹ At the end of verse 6 he says: “6 ...Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.” Then in verse 7 he adds, “7 That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you....”¹²

⁹ I might also note that it’s worth considering that these Jewish elders said nothing about why this slave “deserved” to be healed. There was little or no appeal on his direct behalf. Their entire focus seems to be on what a great guy this centurion was.

¹⁰ See Deuteronomy 10:17; Job 34:19; Acts 10:34-35; Galatians 2:6; and Ephesians 6:9.

¹¹ People of faith ought not to think too highly of themselves, especially not more highly of themselves than they think of others. See Romans 12:3 and Philippians 2:3-4.

¹² The *ESV* translates the elders’ words in verse 4, “...He is WORTHY to have you do this for him.” And it translates the centurion’s words in verse 6, “...for I am NOT WORTHY to have you come under my roof.” It may very well be that the closer Jesus got to this man’s house, the more he felt his own unworthiness. Not unlike Peter who, after the miraculous catch of fish, falls to his knees before Jesus saying, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man.” (Luke 5:8)

The Greek used in verse 6, for “I do not deserve,” is the same as that which is expressed by John the Baptist when he was preparing the way for Jesus, whose sandals he did not feel worthy to carry.¹³ In a similar way, this centurion is conveying a deep sense of reverence for Jesus, and a deep sense of personal humility regarding his own unworthiness to be in Jesus’ presence.¹⁴

Now, none of this is to say that it wasn’t very commendable for this centurion to be so generous and caring, and to do these good deeds. But the faith that this centurion is commended for, by Jesus Himself, was a faith that contained both humility and reverence.¹⁵

> Humility, because given his position of power and wealth, this centurion could have demanded that Jesus come to his house, and do so quickly, but he didn’t.

> And deep reverence, because this centurion showed a proper appreciation for who Jesus was, and how his own stature as a rich and powerful centurion, was far less impressive by comparison.

New Testament scholar Darrell Bock points out that... the centurion’s expression of faith in today’s passage may not be quite a full confession of saving faith, “...but it is a man opening up to what God is doing in Jesus. ...[AND] Before Jesus, great people...pale into insignificance.”¹⁶

The faith of the centurion also shows us that...

3) ...this story of faith is equally about authority.

Luke 7:7-8 goes on, “7 ...But say the word, and my servant will be healed.

8 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” This centurion was a soldier; he’d probably been a soldier for much of his life. He’d worked his way up through the ranks to become the commander of 100 other soldiers, and he oversaw a number of servants in his household as well, so he understood the chain of command, and he understood how authority worked. And somehow, even though Jesus’ authority was a spiritual authority rather than a military one, this centurion’s military lens gave him a keen insight into Jesus’ authority.

¹³ See Matthew 3:11, literally “I am not enough,” “οὐκ εἰμι ἱκανός.”

¹⁴ “In Greek, the words “I do not deserve” are the same as those used by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:11 (“I am not worthy”).” The entire statement reveals how highly the centurion regarded Jesus. Or perhaps his response reflects his own sense of moral guilt in the presence of Jesus.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1605 footnote on Matthew 8:8.

¹⁵ Consider Jesus’ words to His followers in Luke 17:10, “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

¹⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 640.

With all of his years of experience in the military, this centurion had certainly seen his share of bluster, and pretending, and wannabe leaders. But Jesus was none of these; He was the real deal. That's why the centurion was able to say what he said at the end of verse 7: "But say the word, and my servant will be healed." That's all it will take, just one word from the Commander of Healing, from the One who has authority over sickness and death.

Luke then records Jesus' response in verses 9-10,¹⁷ "9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." 10 Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well." The centurion was right! Jesus could do it with just a word, although Luke doesn't record that word for us. Jesus didn't even need to go into the house, or make physical contact with the servant He healed. Jesus' authority is so great, and so powerful, that He can heal from afar...

Let's think about this: by the time Luke wrote his Gospel, Jesus' physical body had ascended into heaven some 30+ years earlier. So by the time Luke's original readers had access to his Gospel, Jesus' had been physically absent from the earth for a long time. Imagine what a great source of encouragement it must have been to his readers, to be reminded that Jesus' authority isn't limited by His physical presence: Jesus' physical presence is absolutely not necessary for His authority to reach our situation.¹⁸

This should also be a great reminder and encouragement to you and me today: Just because Jesus isn't physically present here in our church building this morning, that doesn't mean that we're beyond the reach of His power and authority. ***Brother or Sister in Christ, let your own personal faith be encouraged and inspired today.*** This story of faith is equally about authority (Jesus' authority), not only Jesus' ongoing authority to heal, but also, His ongoing authority to do so much more...

- ...to renew and restore,
- ...to forgive our sin,
- ...to save us and to make us holy
- ...to sustain us in every way.

¹⁷ Amazement! The other place in Scripture where Jesus is amazed is in Mark 6:6, which says, "[Jesus] was AMAZED at their lack of faith...." He was amazed for exactly the opposite reason that the centurion's faith amazed Him. This happened in Nazareth, where it says He could only heal a few sick people, not because His authority to heal was lacking, but because their faith was so limited.

¹⁸ "even though physically absent, Jesus can show his presence effectively. The lesson is a key one for Luke's readers, who no longer have Jesus' physical, visible presence." Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, Vol. 1, 1:1-9:50*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 641.