

The Gospel According to Luke
December 9, 2018
Reading: Matthew 8:5-13

Sermon #26
Luke 7:1-10

The Pursuit Of Faith

Little Faith

At times I question my level of faith. How about you? Sometimes, I wonder not if I have great faith, but if I even have a little faith. I was reading Matthew chapter 14 and took notice of Jesus' rebuke of Peter. I often find myself relating to Peter. You know the story – as the disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee, a great storm had come up and they grew afraid – afraid the boat would sink and they would drown. They had been in another storm on the Sea of Galilee back in Mathew chapter 8, but Jesus was with them during that storm and calmed the storm with his spoken command. However, in this storm Jesus is not with the disciples for he had stayed on the shore to pray.

The disciples had started out as day turned to evening and now it was the 4th watch of night and they had been struggling against the storm for over 6 hours. They were exhausted and scared. While they struggled – Jesus prayed and when he finished praying he rose and went to the disciples. As Jesus came closer to the boat “the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, ‘It is a ghost!’ ” (Matthew 14:26) When Jesus told the disciples not to be afraid Peter responded, still not quite sure, but saying, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” (v.28) Jesus tells Peter to come. But as Peter moves away from the boat his brain takes over and his faith falters. The storm rages above, the waves rise and fall around and the depths of the sea is below. Peter's logic kicks in and his faith gives way – he begins to sink and shouts out in desperation, “Lord save me!” (v.30) Jesus reaches out and saves Peter, who at that moment is the

sinking rock upon which Jesus' church would be built. Jesus says to Peter as he took hold of him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (v.31)

If Peter is a man of little faith, then what am I? After all, Peter is the one who got out of the boat while the rest stayed in. If Peter had little faith what does that say about the faith of the other disciples? Whatever faith, what little faith, they had - I am in the same boat. Furthermore, if Peter's faith, which got him to step out of a boat into a howling storm was little faith, then what in the world does great faith look like?

As I pondered what great faith is, I came to Luke 7 in my study this week. In Luke 7 verses 1 to 10, Jesus encounters a man who had great faith. It comes from a shocking person and exposes some shocking truths. As I studied the passage, I came to a new understanding of what great faith is and how it is developed and how great faith produces great results. Let me ask, would you like to be a person of great faith? I know I would!

Luke 7 verses 1 to 10 provides us with help in understanding what great faith is. This passage comes right after the conclusion of Jesus' instructions to his disciples on how to be a disciple. In Luke chapter 6 Christ teaches with words what it means to follow Him. Now, in Luke chapters 7, 8 and 9, Christ is going to teach by example what it takes to be his disciple – it takes great faith. He has taught the disciples with words. Now he teaches them by example.

Great Faith

The first lesson, the first example is about what is great faith. The scene is set in Luke 7, verses 1 to 2 where we are introduced to a centurion and his sick servant or slave is a better translation. Luke writes, "After he Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² Now a

centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him.” Before we dig in let me give a little background; Centurions were Roman Army officers who generally commanded 100 soldiers. Most of them were Gentiles, though sometimes they were half-Jews or Samaritans. The Jewish people tended to despise centurions for the represented Rome. Not only were they symbolic of Roman rule, they often abused their power and took unjust liberties against the people. But such was not the case with this centurion. We get a glimpse of his character in Luke 7, verse 2, where we read that he had a slave who he “highly valued”. The word “valued” literally means, the servant was held in high honor or considered precious or was of great worth. Such compassion for a slave was unheard of at the time of Jesus by the Romans. The average slave owner of that day had no more regard for his slave than for one of his animals.

To help us understand the Greco-Roman world’s general attitude towards slaves we have the following quotes. The great Greek philosopher Aristotle said, *“There could be no friendship and no justice toward inanimate things, not even toward a horse, an ox, or a slave, because master and slave were considered to have nothing in common. ‘A slave’, he said, ‘is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave.’ ”* (Ethics, 1161b) The Roman law expert, Gaius wrote in his *Institutes 1:52* that it was universally accepted that the master possessed the power of life and death over his slave. Still another Roman writer, Varro, maintained that the only difference between slaves or a beast or a cart was that the slave talked. (On Landed Estates 1:17.1)

This centurion is the exception, he cared for his slave and this dear slave became sick. When the text says he was sick, the Greek literally says he was “having it badly” or “to fare badly”. This slave was more than ill but so sick he was at the point of death. Since Luke was a physician, he was giving a professional diagnosis. From Matthew’s account we learn some additional

information for the centurion says, “[Lord, my servant or slave is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.](#)” (Matthew 8:6) Let me take a little side trail here. Those who claim the Bible is filled with errors point to the differences here between Luke and Matthew. Luke says the centurion send elders from his community to speak to Jesus and Matthew says the centurion asked Jesus. Here is the answer – an ambassador is considered to speak for the one who sent them. Matthew has abbreviated the story for he considered the elders to speak directly for the centurion, where Luke included the detail of the Jewish elders. Now that is settled, let us return to Luke’s account.

The next interesting thing to take note of is found in verse 3, “[When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.](#)” Romans were conquerors and the Jews despised them. Yet, here we find the elders of the community have a relationship with this centurion and are willing to submit to his sending them to Jesus, as his ambassadors and Jesus was also considered an antagonist of the Jewish leaders. The centurion had the authority of Rome and ruled over this area and yet, he had a good relationship with those he ruled.

In verse 4, “[when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, ‘He is worthy to have you do this for him.’](#)” So not only do they come representing the centurion and but plead for Jesus to come to the centurion. Why should Jesus come? Because they say this centurion is worthy? Not only is the centurion concerned about his slave but others also, including the community elders. Is this not how it should be for us? Should we not go before Jesus in prayer for our own needs but the needs of those in our community and trust in Jesus? Faith, faith built upon trust because we believe.

Active Faith

The centurion had heard of Jesus as well as the community elders and but he believed. He had not met or seen Jesus but God the Father had opened his heart to belief. Based on his belief he acted. Reading verses 4 and 5, “when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, ‘He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.’ ” Action based on faith. Is it not to be the same with us? We have heard of Jesus in the testimonies of others, we have read about the life of Jesus and the words of Jesus, if we say we believe Jesus is the Christ should not our life be filled with action to glorify Jesus? Should we not live as our Teacher and Master lived, and share his gospel of salvation with others? The elders tell Jesus, this centurion is worthy because he cares about the people to the point he spent time, energy and money to build them a synagogue. The elders say to Jesus, the centurion is a good man, so please do this for him.

I wonder how often our prayers sound like that? We go to God in prayer saying, “Oh God, I know I am not perfect. I have sinned some, but I am better than before. I have made a few mistakes after all I am only human. Anyway God, I have got this little request for you, which I think I deserve to have answered. I do not ask for much, God. Since I am trying to be good - I go to church and I tithe and I read my Bible every day and I even volunteer at the food pantry. I think you could give me this one thing?” When we approach God like that, we are treating Him like Santa Claus. However, God does not have a heavenly “naughty and nice” list. The prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much, not because the man is righteous and God listens to his prayers more, but because he knows how to pray according to God’s will and live God’s will and this is what makes him righteous. We do not deserve anything from God. We cannot bribe God into answering our prayers because of how good we are or what we have done for Him. Do not go to God asking things from Him by saying, “God, I deserve to be given this request.”

You do not deserve it! You do not deserve anything. Everything God gives to you, He gives out of His generosity, out of His goodness and out of His grace. The Jewish elders did not understand this nor did they believe this. They thought that answers to prayer were earned. But in Luke 7, verses 6 to 8, we see that the Gentile centurion understood differently. The centurion had certainty and understanding that the Jewish elders did not.

Faith With Assurance

In these verses, there are several qualities that set the centurion apart from the Jewish elders. These things show he had greater understanding than the Jews. First, unlike the Jewish elders, this man was considerate. Verse 6, “**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.’**” The centurion is saying you are far too important, Jesus to be troubled or burdened and I am not worthy for you to honor me by coming to my house. In addition, Jews considered it a defilement to enter the house of a Gentile. He thought more highly of Jesus than his own need. He cared for his slave, but he cared for the Messiah more.

You too, should think of others before yourself. Think of their needs and their concerns and put those above your own. When a church community behaves in this manner, everyone’s needs are met and the community becomes a loving community. Secondly, when we approach God, we need to recognize that we are not worthy to approach Him. As Paul wrote, “**Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God.**” (2 Corinthians 3:5) Nor are we worthy enough to expect God to approach us, but he does so out of his love and grace for us. I say this, because it balances out what we see next about the centurion in verse 7. In Luke 7, verse 6, the centurion

approached Christ with consideration and respect. In Luke 7, verse 7, he approaches Christ with assurance.

The centurion's friends repeat his words to Jesus saying, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ⁷ Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed." In Luke 7:6-7, the centurion says that he is not worthy to have Christ come to him or for himself to go to Jesus. So how will the slave be healed? The centurion reveals great confidence in Christ when instead, he says, "say the word, and let my servant be healed." These verbs are imperatives. They are truths. He is saying Jesus, your word or your command will heal my slave and I understand you do not even have to see and touch him. Can we command Jesus? No, that is not what I am saying, but such boldness in prayer is difficult. I certainly struggle with having such boldness, but upon study of most of the prayers found in the Bible I observe that they are bold and assertive. So, I have been asking myself why I am uncomfortable with such boldness.

This centurion is used to making commands and having his orders obeyed, but he is not commanding Jesus. Instead he has full assurance of Jesus' ability to heal without touching or seeing his slave. He is sensitive to the fact Jews consider it defiling to enter the house of a Gentile. He also believes in Jesus from the scriptures! In Book Five of the Psalms it is written, "He, meaning God, sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction." (Psalm 107:20) Here we find a Gentile who knows Scripture and trusts in God. The centurion is saying, "I believe, I have faith – send your word and my slave will be healed." The only way our prayers can be this confident is when we believe the promise of God to pray. The promise must be rightly understood in context; we cannot rip verses out of context to pray confidently. But when we know Scriptural promises, we can pray those promises confidently and gates of hell shake because

of the power of God. Pray “God, I am not worthy that you should come to me or that I should come to you, but I was reading in your Word today. God, do what your Word says. Do it, not because of me, but because Your Word says it.”

Have Jesus’ instructions to his disciples on how to pray ever bothered you? He says in John chapter 14, “**Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.**” (v.13) This does not mean that if you tack on “in Jesus name” at the end of your prayers, you receive what you prayed for. No, what it means is that when you pray for the things Jesus prays for, when you pray for the things according to his teachings, his life, his example, and his will, when you pray these things, they will be done for you because the Father will be gloried in the Son. This is what this centurion does. Yes, he is confident and bold. But he is confident in Christ. He is confident in the word of Jesus. He is confident that Jesus can heal. This confidence springs from something he comprehends and believes about Jesus and the nature of commands. This is what we learn in Luke 7, verse 8.

Reading verse 8 the words of the centurion, “**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.**” He had a comprehension of power. He understood power and how it worked. He understood something about Christ, which no one else understood. I will tell you what he understood, but first you must see how Jesus responds to Luke 7, his response is found in verse 9. The reaction of Jesus provides the point of the entire passage.

Verse 9, “**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.’**” When Jesus hears the words spoken by the centurion’s friends, He

marveled and turned around. Jesus is so impressed at what He hears, He had to stop and make a point to all you were there. He is walking along toward the centurion's house. The friends say to Jesus, "You do not have to come. The centurion says to just say the word and his slave will be healed." Jesus is so impressed at the man's faith, he says to the crowd, **"I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."** To paraphrase Jesus says, "Wow! Here is a man who truly believes and his actions show his faith more than anyone I have met in my travels around Israel!"

Has your faith ever impressed Jesus? "Yes," you say, "My lack of it." Me too. Only one other time in Scripture is Jesus ever described as being amazed concerning faith. When he visits his hometown of Nazareth, he marvels at their complete lack of faith in Luke chapter 4 with the response to Jesus' teaching in the synagogue. (Luke 4:14-30) It is hard to impress Jesus, but when you do, it will either be by your great faith or your lack of it.

When it comes to great faith and little faith, we are probably more like the Jewish people. They prided themselves in being men and women of faith, descendant from Abraham, the father of their faith and they were to be the holders and keepers of the one true faith. Yet, they did not have as great of faith as this Gentile centurion. Instead, the Jews, even the disciples, are rebuked over and over for having little faith.

The difference between great faith and little faith is not one of quantity. Great faith does not have lots and lots of faith, whereas, little faith has hardly any. It is not about percentages and degrees of faith. You and I do not have faith containers in our souls, which overflow when our faith is great and are nearly empty when our faith is little. Faith does not work like that. Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Faith is confidence and

persuasion and belief in something God has said. When you are persuaded that something is true, then you have faith in that truth. Great faith believes and is convinced and is persuaded about some of the harder and more difficult truths of Scripture whereas little faith does not believe or is not convinced or persuaded about these truths.

The centurion had not seen Jesus but he believed, as the writer of Hebrews wrote, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1) The centurion’s faith was rewarded quickly for we read in verse 10, “When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.” We do not always see the results of our faith quickly, but our faith tells us, it is God who is in charge and he has a purpose for all things – His will and in His time. We are called to live by faith – I believe and I am working on submitting to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God for I desire my faith to grow. I desire the faith of a centurion.

What is the great faith of the centurion? Great faith believes greater and more difficult truths than little faith. Great faith is fully convinced of the difficult promises and the hard to understand truths of Scripture. Great faith surrenders to and lives for Christ. Amen.