

**Sunday, June 18, 2023 | Everyday Disciple**

**Week 10 | Luke 7.1-10 | "A Marvelous Faith"**

We've been going through the so-called 'Sermon on the Plain,' and we've covered several topics:

With our discussion of the beatitudes and woes (cf. Lu. 6:20-26), we learned that, **depending on our values, God will call us blessed or cursed.** Should we value His Kingdom and his principles, we'll live in a state of blessedness. However, should we value this kingdom over God's, we are cursed, no matter how "good" our life may seem.

After that, we studied Jesus' most challenging commandment: *love your enemies* (cf. Lu. 6:27-36). And, as with the beatitudes and woes, this commandment shows us that God's values are different from the world's values. Admittedly, this may seem insane at first glance. Bad guys are supposed to be hated, not loved! But, for the Christian, this commandment ought to make perfect sense. After all, if God did not love the sinner, where would that leave us? So, since we have been adopted into the household of God, he will expect his children to love others as he has loved them, even if that means loving the unlovable. **Children of God return virtue for vice.**

We then studied Jesus' most misunderstood saying: *judge not, and you will not be judged*. Contrary to what many think, the Lord was not prohibiting all moral judgments. Instead, he was banning the disingenuous and vindictive type, the hypocritical kind. In fact, that passage actually encouraged us to humbly judge our brother after we've taken care of our own faults. **Otherwise, we'll give bad advice because of our self-esteem and hypocrisy. After all, good advice is the product of self-examination and humility.**

When we discussed the topic of speech, we learned that **whatever goes in must come out.** Words are the window of the heart. Every sentence, phrase, and syllable can tell us something about the person who said it. As a tree is known by its fruit, a person is known by their speech.

Last week, we closed out the 'Sermon on the Plain' by answering, "How can you bring stability to your life?" By obeying the Scriptures. Every book, chapter, verse, and word is like a stone in a building's foundation. **As a house is only as stable as its foundation, so is a life only as stable as its obedience to God's word.**

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Today, we'll explore another miracle of Jesus. But, as we'll see, Luke treats this miracle like an afterthought because, rather than highlight (yet again) Jesus' ability to do marvelous things (cf. Lu. 4:31-41; 5:12-26), our faithful narrator wants to show us that, sometimes, the most remarkable faith can be found in the most unlikely place: a *Roman* centurion. Thus, we'll focus our attention on this man. After all, if his actions amazed even Jesus, we might be able to learn a thing or two from this military leader. To think, even an enemy might have a virtue worth emulation.

The centurion was...

**i. A man of great reputation (vs. 1-5).**

**READ:** Luke 7:1-5 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup>Now a **centurion** had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. <sup>3</sup>When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. <sup>4</sup>And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "**He is worthy** to have you do this for him, <sup>5</sup>for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue."

A centurion was a Roman officer who commanded 100 men, similitter to the rank of an army captain today. Below a centurion, there was a decurion who commanded 10 men; above a centurion, there was a chiliarch who commanded 1,000 men.<sup>1</sup> **And this centurion served in the city of Capernaum, the same town where Jesus performed his first exorcism (cf. Lu. 4:31:37). Is this how he first learned about Jesus?** We can't know for sure.

The fact that this centurion—a man who was a part of the upper echelon in the Roman military—knew anything about the Lord speaks to Jesus' notoriety. Everyone (even those of Rome) was well-acquainted with the name Jesus. **And, for Luke's gentile audience, this is a significant point of interest.** Though Jesus came, first and foremost, to the nation of Israel, the Lord was willing to engage with non-Jews also. **Interestingly, this is one of many centurions who Luke portrays as good men (cf. centurion at the cross - Lu. 23:47; Cornelius – Ac. 10; centurion saved Paul during a shipwreck – Ac. 27:43).**

Historically, we know that centurions were extremely wealthy compared to the rest of the populace. For example, while the lowest foot soldier in Rome would earn roughly 75 denarii

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<sup>1</sup> Morris, Leon, *Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Grand Rapids, MI; InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 155.

annually, centurions could earn upwards of 7,500 denarii.<sup>2</sup> This particular centurion was wealthy, as evidenced by his building a synagogue in Capernaum. Consequently, the Jewish delegates point to the synagogue as proof of the centurion's worthiness. This military leader had done something unique and noteworthy for the Jews in the city. **And this, alone, made him worthy of God's help; or so the Jewish elders thought.**

But while the synagogue proves the centurion's character, we can also point to the fact that he wanted to help his servant as evidence that this Roman officer was a good man and thus worthy of Jesus' help. The scriptures say he "highly valued" his servant, which is to say that the centurion thought of his servant not as being a valuable asset but as being "precious" (1 Pet. 2:4), "honorable" (Lu. 14:8), and very beloved. And we know this because, in verse 7, he refers to this servant as his **παῖς** (*pais*), which is a Greek word that can also refer to young children (cf. Mat. 17:18; 21:15; Lu. 2:43; 8:51, 54; Ac. 20:12).<sup>3</sup> **This servant was near and dear to the centurion's heart like a son is near and dear to a father's heart.**

## ii. **A man of great humility (vs. 6-8).**

**READ:** Luke 7:6-8 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. <sup>8</sup> 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."

**Though the Jewish delegation called the centurion "worthy," here we find the centurion's self-estimation; he insists that he is "not worthy" at all.** Whatever reports this centurion had been given about Jesus, they had convinced this Roman military leader that the Lord was special. So special, he did not only think that his "roof" was unfit to house Jesus, but the centurion also believed that he was not good enough to even come to Jesus himself! In this, the centurion is similar **to John the Baptist**, who did not think himself worthy enough to even lose Jesus' sandals

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<sup>2</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 1:1-9:50*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 1994), p. 635.

<sup>3</sup> Edwards, James R., *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), p. 209.

(cf. Lu. 3:16), **and Peter**, who, after Jesus caused him to catch some fish, said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lu. 5:8).<sup>4</sup>

**What's more, notice how the centurion does not say to Jesus, "For I too am a man *with* authority" he says, "For I too am a man *set under* [emphasis added] authority...."<sup>5</sup> Even when this centurion wielded power, even when he could say to one to 'Go' and to another 'Come,' he only thought of himself as a conduit for power and not the power itself. He merely commanded others what was commanded of him. **In his mind, the word of Rome had authority, not the centurion.** And amazingly, the centurion applied this principle to Jesus. He must've thought that if this is how power works here, it must be the same with God.**

**But, concerning the centurion's worthiness, do not miss that the centurion was correct and the Jews were wrong.** This man was unworthy. And it is precisely because he realized this that he became a recipient of God's unmerited grace. God's grace is never earned and is only ever freely given (cf. Rom. 3:24). We must come to Him humbly, or we'll not come to him at all.

### **iii. A man of great faith (vs. 9-10).**

**READ:** Luke 7:9-10 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

To be clear, when Luke tells us that Jesus "marveled" at the centurion, it is not that Jesus was surprised in the sense that the centurion's words were unexpected. The Lord, being God, knew all things from beginning to end, and he knew the centurion better than the centurion knew himself. Even as Jesus set off in the centurion's direction, he knew he would not make it far. However, Jesus was also human and so had human reactions. The Lord did not live an emotionless life. When he was sad, Jesus cried (cf. Jn. 11:35). When he was happy, the Lord rejoiced (cf. Lu. 10:21). This is the mystery of the incarnation. **And so, in our passage, Jesus experiences astonishment and expresses amazement** when something amazing happens. While the Jewish leaders commended the centurion's good deed, Jesus applauded the man's faith. **Learn well, my friends, God is not impressed with good deeds, only great faith.**

In fact, what's truly remarkable about this scene is that, out of the four gospels, **we're told that Jesus "marveled" only twice:** here and in Mark 6:6, where he was marveling at the unbelief of

<sup>4</sup> Garland, David E., *Luke*, The Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 2011), p. 296.

<sup>5</sup> Morris (1988), p. 158.

Nazareth, his hometown. **Meaning only two things amaze Jesus: *pigheaded* unbelief and *lionhearted* belief.** The centurion did not timidly trust the Lord; he was as bold and brazen with his faith as a lion. Unlike the father who once cried out to Jesus, "I believe; help my unbelief" (Mar. 9:24), this soldier had faith enough to spare. He knew that Jesus needed only to speak the word, and it would be so.

### **So, what's the takeaway?**

In Christianity, seeing is not believing; believing is seeing.

**READ:** John 20:24-29 (ESV)

<sup>24</sup> Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

<sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." <sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

When humility and faith mix, great things happen. To remove one's self from the equation is to give God space to work wonders.

## Video Description

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: