

THE FAITH OF THE CENTURION

Luke 7:1-10

Key Verse: 7:9

“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.’”

In the last passage Jesus told his new disciples, “Love your enemies.” For most of us, it is hard enough to love our family members and friends. But Jesus challenges us to go beyond mere human affection to learn the heart of God who is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. To us, it seems impossible. But when we remember how God loved each of us when we were his enemies—when we remember the grace of Jesus who shed his blood for our sins—we can love our enemies with the love of God. We pray for America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But at present there is an impression that if one American is injured by “others,” ten “others” will be injured in return. If we continue to practice this policy, we will make enemies, nation by nation. We must pray that the love of God may sprout in America, beginning in our own hearts, until the love of God changes America into a shepherd nation. The Muslim world can be won over to God by the love of Jesus, not by military force. May God make America a holy nation and a missionary-sending nation with the love of Jesus.

In today’s passage Jesus meets a Roman centurion. Although the man was a Gentile and a soldier, he had faith that amazed Jesus. We want to learn his faith. What kind of faith do you have? Would Jesus admire your faith? Or would Jesus be ashamed of your faith? May God help us to have the faith that Jesus admires through this study.

First, the Roman centurion had a shepherd’s heart (1-2).

Look at verse 1. “When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.” Jesus had just finished sharing the most beautiful message, sometimes called, “The Sermon on the Plain,” with his new disciples and all other people. Jesus did this after spending a night in prayer and choosing his twelve apostles one by one. For Jesus, it had been more than “a day’s work.” It had been a life-giving effort to establish a new history of God that would get the world back on its right track. Physically, Jesus must have been exhausted. He entered Capernaum, perhaps to visit Peter’s house.

Look at verse 2. “There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.” In this verse, we meet a centurion and his servant. A centurion was a Roman soldier who was in charge of 100 foot soldiers. He had to be well-disciplined, loyal to the Roman army at any cost, and trained in the art of war. Moreover, he had to discipline the men under his command to fight to the death if need be. Needless to say, a Roman centurion had to be tough, both mentally and physically. At that time, Rome ruled the world. A Roman centurion wielded power to oppress and crush colonial peoples. The British historian, Lord Acton, said, “Power tends to corrupt....” Many centurions abused their power and committed acts of brutality (Lk 3:14). As a result, they became cruel and heartless. At that time, there were many kinds of servants and slaves in the Roman Empire. They had no human rights. They were regarded as the property of their owners. Many masters treated their servants decently when they were healthy, but abandoned them when they were ill. Some masters even abused them to gratify their sadistic desires.

However, the Roman centurion in this passage did not abuse his power or his servant. In fact, quite the opposite was true. He valued his servant highly. He saw his servant, not as a piece of property, but as a human being. He did his best to take care of his servant. He took care of his servant all the more when he was ill. He has the image of a shepherd more than that of a soldier.

Maybe the servant’s name was Daniel. In the course of serving the centurion, he had become one in mind and heart. When the centurion asked him something, Daniel did it with all his strength, solely to please his master. The centurion could trust Daniel with any job or responsibility. And the centurion took care of Daniel in every way, like his own son. As time went by, a love relationship between them grew; their joy was to work together, no matter the task. As a city administrator, the centurion found Daniel to be invaluable. He would not trade him for anyone or anything. But one day, Daniel fell ill. It began with a fever and flu symptoms. They hoped he would be better in a few days. But instead of getting better, he got worse. The centurion must have visited doctors, hospitals and pharmacies and even tried Chinese herb medicine and acupuncture. But the sickness kept on advancing. Now Daniel

was near death. As the centurion heard Daniel's ragged breathing and saw his utter helplessness, he could not but shed tears which rolled down his cheeks continuously. He wished the sickness was an enemy soldier so he could kill it with his spear. But it was not. His centurion's training and military authority were totally useless to heal his servant. At this point, many men would give up in despair. But where there is a shepherd's heart, there is no giving up. Instead, there is life-giving spirit. In John 10:11, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." The centurion had the image of Jesus in his shepherd's heart. A miracle begins with a shepherd's heart.

Second, the centurion found hope in Jesus (3-6).

Look at verse 3. "The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant." The centurion heard the name of Jesus. He heard how Jesus healed a man with leprosy. He heard how Jesus healed a paralyzed man. He heard how Jesus healed a man with a shriveled hand. When human hope was gone, he found hope in Jesus. He must have said the name, "Jesus" over and over again. As hope grew in his heart, he pounded his right fist into his left hand and resolved to ask Jesus to heal his servant. But even in that emergency situation, the centurion did not rush up to Jesus with a demanding attitude. Instead, he sent some elders of the Jews to Jesus with a humble request. Through his military training he realized the importance of keeping basic order even in an emergency. Though he was a Roman centurion, he saw Jewish society with respect. He did not try to coerce Jesus, but consulted the elders of the Jews and asked their help to gain Jesus' favor.

When the elders came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue" (4-5). This Roman centurion had won the hearts of the Jewish elders. As we know, Jewish elders were quite perceptive. They would not give their hearts to help a Roman centurion unless he was sincere and trustworthy. When they went to Jesus on the centurion's behalf, they had no reservation or pretense at all. They pleaded earnestly with Jesus. For the first time, they got down on their knees, folded their hands, bowed their heads, and asked Jesus' help earnestly. They recognized the centurion's love for their nation.

It is amazing that the centurion loved the nation of Israel. Those concerned with advancement in the Roman army served in Judea grudgingly. But this centurion loved the nation Israel. He must have been moved by the beauty of Jewish society, based on the Law of God and the worship of the one true God. So he was happy to build their synagogue, not as a gesture, but out of his deep respect and love for the people of Israel. The Roman centurion was a man of true humanity. He was a man made in the image of God who grew in love and respect for others until he could love the nation Israel and her people. When Jesus heard the Jewish elders' plea, he went with them. Jesus must have been moved by the fact that the Jewish elders recognized the centurion. Jesus must have been most deeply moved by the centurion's shepherd heart for his dying servant.

Through the centurion we learn that humanity training is a good foundation on which to build faith in the word of God. Therefore, it is good to study for a Ph.D. To get a Ph.D., one must submit himself to the rigors of academic discipline and fully comply with the demands of his advisor. Sometimes, it is really humiliating. Finally, the student learns that he knows nothing except that he must honor his advisor, learn many things, and grow throughout his lifetime. Then he can get a Ph.D.

Last Thursday, we heard a beautiful concert performed by the Chicago UBF Orchestra, titled, "Whatever is noble...." Dr. Samuel Lee started this orchestra to discipline young people through classical music to develop their humanity and build a spiritual foundation. To participate in the orchestra they overcome base desires and devote themselves to practice and perform classical music for the glory of God. In this way, they struggle to have a noble desire and live up to it. Surely God is pleased by their struggle and blessed their concert abundantly. They played so beautifully that we felt we were in heaven, not on earth. It seemed that the Spirit of God was dancing on the violin strings and the angels of God were sounding the trumpets and horns. May God bless each of them, one by one, to meet Jesus very personally and be shepherds for this generation.

Third, the centurion had faith in Jesus' words (7-8).

Look at verse 7. "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. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.'" When Jesus started toward his house, the centurion

stopped thinking about his dying servant and began to think about Jesus. When he realized that Jesus was coming to his house, he was shocked at his own conduct. The fear of God came into his heart. He perceived Jesus' divine nature and holiness. He trembled at the thought of the holy Jesus coming to his Gentile residence. His reverence for Jesus is well expressed in his words, "I do not deserve to have you come under my roof."

Nevertheless, the centurion said to Jesus, "But say the word, and my servant will be healed." When the centurion had a trembling heart before Jesus, he could understand and believe the authority of Jesus' word. He was sure that if Jesus said the word his servant would be healed. He had great faith. His servant was dying, yet he believed that Jesus' one word would heal his servant completely.

How did the centurion come to have such faith? Look at verse 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." In the Roman army, there was absolute obedience to the commanding officer. The centurion knew what it meant to be "under authority." He had to obey his superior officer absolutely. There were no excuses, no questions and no alternatives. It was "obey to the death." As some famous soldiers said, "Ours is not to reason why, ours is but to do and die." Later, when the centurion gained authority, he used his authority to command the soldiers under him. Now, when Jesus was on the way to his house, he saw holy God Almighty in Jesus. He saw Jesus as the Commander-in-Chief of the spiritual world. He may have understood Jesus better than Jesus' disciples did. On the outside, Jesus looked like a poor carpenter from Nazareth. But crowds of people followed him wherever he went. Jesus' word healed the sick. Jesus' word drove out evil spirits. Jesus' word compelled rational men to leave everything and follow him. The centurion understood authority. And he knew Jesus had it. He knew that all Jesus had to do was "say the word" and his servant would be healed.

When we have "say the word" faith we can experience Jesus' healing. As we know, Dr. Daniel Hong has been very sick with a diseased liver. He needed a transplant, but it never worked out. So he considered a "living donor" and his nephew Augustine Hong, who wants to be a medical doctor, courageously offered his own liver. However, their blood types did not match. Dr. Hong's condition grew worse and worse and some began to lose hope for his recovery. But Mother Barry believed that if Jesus just said the word, he would be healed. She encouraged us to pray for him last Sunday and we did. Then a miracle happened. A donor was discovered who was just 24 years old. It so happened that in the rotation of hospitals, it was time for Dr. Hong's hospital to receive the liver. And it so happened that a doctor had just moved Dr. Hong to the top of the list to receive a liver, seeing that he has a wife and three children and is a professor. The liver was an exact match. Surgery was scheduled for 3:00 a.m. Monday morning. On hearing this, we prayed again in our homes Sunday night. Mother Barry set her alarm clock for 2:00 a.m. and got up and prayed for successful surgery. By God's grace, the surgery was successful. Now Dr. Hong is recovering. Still, we must pray. But we must also give glory to God who answers prayer and blesses "say the word" faith.

Jesus' word has power to heal the sick, both physically and spiritually. Many young people are sick spiritually. But Jesus' word can heal them. One young man was growing spiritually until he was overcome by a "Romeo mentality" and stagnated. He became dispirited and could not study well or teach the Bible to others. He looked more like a zombie than a young man. Then his shepherds began to pray earnestly for him and helped him prepare a Bible message for the Easter Conference. By God's grace, Jesus' word spoke to him. Jesus' word healed his heart and made him well. He delivered a wonderful message. Afterward, two sheep eagerly asked him to teach them the Bible and he has faithfully taken care of them. He finished spring semester with good grades and is gaining spiritual power through Friday testimony sharing. Jesus' word has the power to heal spiritual sickness completely.

Jesus really wants us to have "say the word" faith. Matthew 28:18-20 says, "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" Jesus wants us to believe his spiritual authority with absolute faith. Jesus wants us to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey his words as we have obeyed his words. Jesus wants us to conquer the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God has blessed Chicago UBF to participate in world mission work. We have had the privilege to send delegates to Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Moscow, Africa, Mexico, France, China, North Korea, Kiev and Odessa so far this year. Now we are praying for the World Mission Report in Seoul and Mother Barry's message. We are sending a 63-member delegation from the United States, including many top leaders from Chicago. It is right for us to do so. But

at the same time, we must diligently carry out one-to-one Bible studies by believing Jesus' words and teaching them to young people. We must engage in summer ministry with the attitude of soldiers of Jesus Christ to please our commanding officer by reaching 1,000 one-to-one Bible studies. For this, Dr. Joseph Chung visits his sheep day and night. If they live within 10 miles, he rides his bicycle to their houses. If they live 50 miles away, he drives his car to visit them. His sheep have been so happy to receive him and study the Bible with him. Though he is the senior Elder, he is working the hardest as a soldier of Jesus Christ, having at least ten one-to-one Bible studies each week. However, many young men who should be diligent one-to-one Bible teachers are more like civilians than Christian soldiers. May God renew our spirit as soldiers of Christ and help us to teach the Bible diligently this summer.

Fourth, Jesus admires the centurion's faith (9-10).

Look at verse 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.'" Jesus was amazed at the centurion's faith. In the gospel accounts, Jesus was never amazed by anyone or anything, except by his hometown people's unbelief. But here Jesus was amazed by the centurion's faith. Therefore, we must take note and learn from him. Let's briefly review the contents of his faith. First, he had a shepherd heart for his dying servant. Second, he genuinely respected and loved the Jewish people to the degree that he was recognized by the Jewish elders. Third, he recognized the holy God in Jesus. Fourth, he had absolute faith in the power of Jesus' word. Jesus was amazed at him and praised his faith greatly, saying, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." The Roman centurion was a Gentile, but Jesus recognized his faith. Jesus is not only the God of the Jews, but the God of the Gentiles, too. Jesus reveals the universal love of God for all people of all nations. Those who have faith are blessed by God, be they Jew or Gentile.

Look at verse 10. "Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well." Through the centurion's faith, Jesus healed his dying servant. Daniel sat up and breathed deeply. The color returned to his face and peace came into his heart. He must have thanked God for Jesus. He must have thanked God for his good shepherd, the centurion. When we have absolute faith in the word of Jesus, many young people can be healed.

May God help us to learn the faith of the centurion, beginning with his shepherd's heart. May God help us to believe the word of Jesus with absolute faith and serve many young people through one-to-one Bible study. May God help each of us amaze Jesus with our faith.