

# “SUCH GREAT FAITH”

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.’”**

Luke’s gospel teaches us who Jesus is and the importance of having faith in him. Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of all mankind. Jesus blesses faith. When some men brought a paralytic to him by faith, Jesus forgave his sins and healed his paralysis (5:20). When sinful and sick people came to Jesus with faith, he said, **“your faith has saved you...your faith has healed you,”** and they were saved and healed (7:50; 8:48; 17:19). In today’s passage, Jesus is amazed by the faith of a Roman centurion and heals his dying servant. Jesus is not easily amazed. Aside from this event, there is only one other time in the gospels that Jesus is amazed; it was by the lack of faith of hometown people (Mk 6:6). Jesus can be amazed by faith or by lack of faith. Jesus is pleased to bless faith, while those who lack faith will perish. Ultimately, having faith in Jesus is most important for any human being. It is more important than getting good grades, getting a good job, or marrying well. Since Jesus upholds the centurion in today’s passage as exemplary in faith, we should learn from him. In this man we can catch a glimpse of God’s love, an example of humble servanthip, and genuine faith in Jesus and his word. May the Holy Spirit plant faith in Jesus as we hear this story.

**First, the centurion’s love reflects God’s love (1-2).** From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus called disciples and taught them his value system, loving enemies, not to judge others, and to become good people and wise builders. When Jesus had finished all this teaching, he entered Capernaum (1). Now Jesus would demonstrate his teachings through practical life in Capernaum. It was an important city at the time; Matthew had a tax booth there, and a Roman garrison was there. But the reason we still talk about it today is that Jesus made his home there and did many miracles there (Mk 2:1; Mt 11:23; Lk 4:23). Among them is the healing of a centurions’ servant.

Verse 2 says, **“There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.”** Who were centurions? They were Roman officers in charge of 100 men.<sup>1</sup> They came from the lower class, were chosen for their bravery, and were highly trained, like Navy Seals. They were noted for their

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ancient.eu/Centurion/>

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loyalty, standing firm at their post to the death. Rome could rule the world because of them. Roman centurions in that society had considerable authority and influence. On the other hand, servants were thought to be of little value, like a battery. When their power was gone they were thrown away and replaced with a new one (see 1Sa 30:13). It is sinful human nature that those in positions of power disregard the marginalized.

However, the centurion in this passage valued his servant highly. He did not exploit his privilege on the basis of the social hierarchy. He was not indifferent to a sick servant on the basis of pragmatism. He valued his servant on the basis of common humanity. He respected the life of his servant as a fellow human being. So he treated his servant honorably. By the same token, this servant must have been grateful for his master and served him from his heart. They had a good relationship, more like a father and son than a master and servant. But something happened. One day, a speeding chariot struck the servant and ran him over. He suffered from broken bones and internal bleeding and paralysis set in (Mt 8:6). Heartbroken, the centurion tried to help him in many ways: a comfortable bed, plenty of cool water, nutritious food, and medical care. But nothing helped. The servant was on the verge of death. It seemed that there was nothing the centurion could do. But he did not give up. His love was stronger than death.

Here we catch a glimpse of God’s love for people. God does not love people because they have social status, money, or achievements. God loves us because we are human beings, made in his image. God does not stop loving us when we get old or sick and seem useless. God loves us in the midst of sickness, weakness and failure. God’s love is unconditional, unchanging and everlasting. God’s love never fails. God’s love for us shines most brightly when we are in the greatest need. God demonstrated his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Ro 5:8). We are each dearly loved by God. We should believe this with faith. On the basis of God’s love for us, we should also love others.

As the centurion loved his servant, he also suffered together with him. The thought of how to help his dying servant consumed his heart and mind. He could not eat well or sleep well, and suffered from stress. No matter how much he struggled, there seemed to be no solution. Then he heard some good news. As a centurion, he received many reports of what was going on in his area. He heard how Jesus had said to a paralyzed man, **“I tell you, take your mat and go home”** (Lk 5:24). And immediately the man stood up, took his mat and went home. He heard how Jesus told a man with a shriveled hand, **“Stretch out your hand”** (Lk 6:10). And when he did so, his hand was completely restored. At the news of Jesus,

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hope sprang up in his heart. He said, “Yes!” He found a way in Jesus. As Paul explains, his faith came from hearing the message about Christ (Ro 10:17). Just hearing about what Jesus has done inspires faith in people’s hearts. The catalyst was his love for his dying servant. Love and faith are closely related. Faith is not just believing a doctrine; it is believing a person who is characterized by love. Galatians 5:6b says, **“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”** 1 John 3:14 says, **“We know that we have passed from death to life because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death.”** When we want to have faith that amazes Jesus, we need to love those around us. There are many around us who need love and care and prayers. Let’s ask ourselves, “Who am I loving at this time?”

**Second, the centurion’s humble servanthip reflects Christ (3-5).** The centurion probably wanted to run to Jesus immediately. But as a Gentile, he could not approach Jesus directly, for Jews do not associate with Gentiles. So he sent some of the elders of the Jews with the request that Jesus come and heal his servant (3). These elders pleaded earnestly with Jesus (4a). This is surprising. Pleading comes from the heart; it is not merely an act of duty. Their relationship with the centurion was heart to heart. Elders of the Jews were well known for their bigotry, stubbornness and contempt for the Gentiles. Specifically, they resisted the Romans as a matter of life and death. It would seem impossible for the centurion to have a heart to heart relationship with these elders. But he had won their affection. How?

In verses 4b-5 the elders say to Jesus, **“This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.”** They regarded the centurion as deserving of Jesus’ favor. They were shrewd judges of character; they would not have been deceived by political gestures. They trusted that the centurion genuinely loved their nation. This kind of trust does not develop quickly or easily. It comes over time as the fruit of sacrifice, and it is tested through trials. How had the centurion built up this kind of trust? Obviously, in his leadership, he refrained from exercising brute force. Rather, he humbled himself to serve. He took time to understand the people of Capernaum. He came to know how much they wanted a synagogue. So he built it for them. He must have sacrificed his own time and money, and employed his men as well. In this way, he won their trust.

We can learn from him how to build relationships of genuine trust, in spite of serious cultural barriers. It is through humble servanthip. In this respect, the centurion has the image of Jesus. Though Jesus is the Almighty Creator God, he emptied himself and came into the world as a human being. He did not come as a royal prince on a throne, but was born to a poor, ordinary family and laid in a

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manger. He did not demand people to serve him, but he served all kinds of people according to their need. He healed the sick, drove out demons, forgave sins, and planted the living words of God in people’s hearts. Finally, he bore all of our weaknesses in his body and died on the cross for our sins. His humble, sacrificial service has moved us sinners to repent, accept his love and put our trust in him. As we learn this humble servanthip, we can also build relationships of trust with others. Let’s learn the sacrificial servant’s heart to listen, understand, discover the need, and help our brothers and sisters. On Friday we heard a joyful and spirited message from Elijah Park. He confessed that he has so many friends among many different kinds of people: Korean, American, Filipino, Hispanic, Chinese, students, business people, neighborhood people, older people, younger people and even little children who call him “Grandpa.” It is because he practices the humble servanthip of Christ. All barriers among us will disappear when we practice the humble service of Christ.

**Third, the centurion’s “just say the word” faith (6-10).** When the elders pleaded earnestly with Jesus, his heart was moved and he went with them (6a). But as Jesus drew near, the centurion sent friends to say to Jesus: **“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”** (6b-7a). At first, with a sense of urgency to heal his dying servant, he had pleaded for Jesus to come to his house. Now he was telling Jesus not to come. What had happened? The centurion’s spiritual eyes began to open. Calling on Jesus in the time of need was his initial act of faith. Through it he entered the spiritual world. When he realized that Jesus was coming to help him, he began to consider who Jesus was. Suddenly, he was aware that Jesus was more than he had thought. Jesus was not just a healer; Jesus is the Lord. Jesus is awesome, holy and divine. Jesus is the Supreme Commander of all things, seen and unseen. Colossians 1:16 describes Jesus’ supremacy: **“For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.”** When the centurion began to see who Jesus was, he became aware of his unworthiness. He was conscious of his sin, like Peter at the large catch of fish (Lk 5:8). Suddenly he knew that he did not deserve to have Jesus come to his house. So he sent friends to stop him. Here we learn that faith involves growing in the knowledge of Jesus and of oneself. Faith leads us to recognize Jesus as the Almighty God, Sovereign Ruler and holy Judge, and I myself as a sinner. This spiritual knowledge breaks the idols in our hearts—human ideas that we have fashioned as gods. It also breaks through the delusions about ourselves. It helps us to see God and ourselves as we really are. It is the basis of a real relationship with Jesus.

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Knowing who Jesus is enables us to have a right attitude toward his word. In verse 7b, the centurion said, **“But say the word and my servant will be healed.”** He believed that Jesus’ words have great power. This is true. Jesus’ words transcend time and space. Jesus’ words drive out demons, heal any kind of sickness, and even give life to the dead. At one word of Jesus, his dying servant would be healed completely. Jesus’ word has absolute authority. How could the centurion understand this? In verse 8 he said, **“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.”** The centurion understood the authority of Jesus’ word through his army training. In the army he had learned how to submit to authority and to exercise authority. A commander’s words, even if they seem unreasonable, must be obeyed as a matter of life and death; no excuses and no delay. The centurion applied this understanding of authority to Jesus as the Supreme Commander. So he could say, **“just say the word and my servant will be healed,”** and Jesus healed his servant (10). When Jesus just says the word, it will be done. As we have believed this, Jesus has demonstrated his power and love among us. In Michelle Li’s desperate struggle with her failing kidney, God’s people cried out to Jesus to just say the word. Then by a miracle she was granted a new kidney. When there were complications with the surgery, God’s people again cried out to Jesus and she was healed. Now she is serving the Lord actively. When David Kim in Tempe, Arizona had a life-threatening liver illness, God’s people cried out in prayer, believing that if Jesus just says the word his servant will be healed. Then David was suddenly granted a new liver even though he was far down on the waiting list. Now he is recovering day by day and gaining new strength to serve the Lord. When Jesus just says the word, any kind of person can be healed completely and become healthy and strong. This applies not only to physical sickness, but also to spiritual sickness. Let’s pray that Jesus may **“just say the word”** so the sick around us may be healed.

When Jesus heard the centurion’s words, 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”** (9). Jesus commended his faith highly. There are two reasons. One is because Jesus was pleased by his faith. The other was to encourage the people of Israel to have faith in him and his word. Though they had many spiritual blessings, when they did not see who Jesus was and the authority of his word, they missed the blessing of his coming. This made Jesus very sorry. Later, he laments over Capernaum (Lk 10:15). But Jesus found faith in this Gentile

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centurion. In fact, he called it “**such great faith.**” Jesus values faith regardless of any human distinctive. Anyone who has faith in Jesus can be blessed by him.

Today we have learned how to be people who amaze Jesus from the centurion. Let’s grow to be people of love and humble servanthip. Most of all, let’s believe that when Jesus “**just says the word,**” our sick loved ones will be healed in every way.