

A Faith That Acts
Luke 7:1-10

have faith in.

We live in a nation that has availability of the marvels of modern medicine. The advances that are being made are beyond comprehension. In just about every neighborhood there is an urgent care facility nearby to handle late night medical needs. Depending on where you live a hospital may be less than an hour's drive. You don't feel well and you can be shuttled to the hospital where attending physicians and specialists can determine a diagnosis and course of treatment. Even life threatening situations can be addressed quickly. But medicine still has its uncertainties. That's why they call it practicing medicine – for the unknowns.

In Jesus' day there were doctors for sure and some were quacks – in it just for the money or the notoriety or both. But there were those who had a genuine interest in medical practice assisting the sick or injured as best they could with their knowledge of medicine and anatomy.

Our passage today is about a medical need met by Jesus. We find it in Luke 7:1-10 where I invite you to turn. As we consider this passage I want us to ponder what prompted a centurion to turn to the Great Physician for help. The simple answer is that it was all about faith, but I want to assure you that it was not a simple faith.

His faith was passionate

His faith was purposeful

His faith was powerful

My prayer is that we might look at this man's faith and ask if that is the kind of faith we have.

I. HIS FAITH WAS PASSIONATE – v. 1-2

There is but one Greek word for faith and simply means belief or trust, especially in a higher power and it is belief or trust that is active, something that is ongoing. In is utter confidence in the One we

Romans 1:17 says “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The just shall live by faith.’” This means that faith is twofold. First there is a faith or belief that saves and second, there is a faith that sanctifies. Saving faith is that by which we come to understand and believe that the penalty for our sin was paid for by Jesus Christ on the cross, sufficient to satisfy the demands of God and by our faith in the finished work of Jesus' sacrifice we have credited to our account a onetime deposit of His righteousness to us so that we are saved. He never has to sacrifice Himself again and we never need to have saving faith again. We find this faith in such verses as Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace are you saved through faith...” and John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes shall not perish but have everlasting life.”

Sanctifying faith is that faith which continues to follow God no matter what the cost, no matter what the circumstances. It is a daily faith. It is a trust in the leading of God even though we don't know the path on which He is leading and we may not even understand why that is the path He has chosen. Sanctifying faith is seen in Proverbs 3:5-6 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths.”

When you look at passages where faith is used what we note is that we never find out what faith is but we do see what faith does. It is described as action. For example in Hebrews 11:1 we are told that faith is “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

In verse 2 we are told “by faith we understand that the universe was created at God's command.”

In verse 6 we see faith pleases God. In the context of chapter 11 it is faith that is both saving faith and sanctifying faith. Let's be clear that it was not their

actions that saved them but their actions were the result of their faith and that faith led them to do incredible things for God.

As a matter of fact when you look at all of Hebrews 11 we see evidence of what faith does. But from it we conclude that real faith, genuine faith believes or trusts – in all things, every day, with all we are.

Faith is a fundamental virtue in the New Testament. According to I Corinthians 13:13 among the things that remain faith is named along with hope, and love.

And when you put it in that perspective - faith, hope, and love – that is what we see evidenced in the life of the centurion. He had a passionate faith.

Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount and returned to His ministry base in Capernaum. The construct in the Greek gives it two possibilities. It could mean He went to Capernaum immediately followed the discourse or it could mean that sometime after the discourse He went to Capernaum. It could have been a few days or even a week or more. It's difficult to pin down given how the sentence is structured in the Greek. Luke merely wants to convey that in the sequence of events Jesus preached a Sermon challenging people to righteousness and then He returned to Capernaum where the next ministry opportunity would take place.

This passage is about an unlikely person. While the ministry of Jesus was to the lost sheep of Israel, it was not limited to Jews. This passage shows us that Jesus was willing to meet with any and all who called on Him, even Gentiles.

In Capernaum there lived a centurion. His name is unimportant to us, but not to God. His name is not excluded because he was a Gentile, I think it was excluded to let us know that it could be anyone. It

could be you. It could be me. It certainly is anyone with a need, a need that only Jesus can meet.

The Roman Empire had legions of soldiers. Like any military in any nation, Rome divided its army into groups. A legion consisted of 6,000 soldiers. Each legion was divided into 10 cohorts. A cohort had 600 soldiers. Each cohort had 6 centurions who led 100 soldiers. A centurion would be equivalent to a captain of our day.

Roman historian Polybius described centurions as “not so much venturesome daredevils as natural leaders of a steady and sedate spirit, not so much men who will initiate attacks and open the battle as men who will hold their ground when worsted and hard pressed and be ready to die at their posts.”

When you consider the several instances in the Gospels and Acts where a centurion is mentioned we don't see a hardened, warmonger. They aren't calloused and ruthless or brutal. It was a centurion at Jesus' crucifixion who said “surely this was the Son of God.

It was the centurion who went to Pilate with the news that Jesus had died.

We find Cornelius the centurion in Acts 10:1-2 being described as God-fearing.

This unnamed centurion is of the same character. We see how passionate he is in these verses, first, toward his servant.

Notice in verse 2 his unusual character. “There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.” Matthew describes the condition of the servant as being “paralyzed and in terrible suffering.”

Whatever it was, it was serious. The servant was dying. Whatever it was there was no hope for him through any medical intervention of the day. Because the centurion valued this servant we can assume that he went to no expense to get him

whatever help possible to cure him. This was unusual treatment. Slaves were typically treated as property. One historian of the day said that the only difference between a slave, an animal and a piece of furniture was that slaves could talk. Sounds a lot like how slaves were treated in our country before and leading up to the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation signed by President Lincoln.

They were to be used and when they wore out, you got another. They could be mistreated because they were just property.

This servant was different. Some scholars suggest that the wording supports the idea that this slave was a young boy, perhaps a teen, yet regardless of his age this centurion valued him, as the KJV says the servant was dear to him. He saw this servant not just as a servant, but almost as a son. There was great affection for this servant. He cared deeply that this servant was dying and there wasn't anything that he had done for him that was helping and there wasn't anything he could do that would help. He was desperate.

How many of you believe that when you are desperate you are moved to do things you might not otherwise do? But then faith will cause you to do things like that.

His faith was passionate.

His faith was purposeful.

II. HIS FAITH WAS PURPOSEFUL – v. 3-8

Notice how the faith of the centurion was purposeful.

Verse 3 begins by stating that “the centurion heard of Jesus.”

Now it is estimated that the town of Capernaum had a population of approximately 1,500 people during the time of Jesus. It is unknown how long Jesus had

lived there using it as his base of ministry. Neither do we know how long the centurion had lived there, but certainly long enough to have financed the construction of the synagogue.

I'm puzzled as to what it means that when he heard of Jesus. Certainly as a Roman Captain it would be in his best interest to know about the goings on of people in your jurisdiction, especially religious teachers who may use that platform to incite an uprising. And Jesus certainly didn't hide in a corner and teach secretly. People followed Him everywhere and when they did two things generally happened: He taught and He healed. Remember that Capernaum was situated on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and a trade route ran through so that news of significance would travel along with the merchants going from city to city. We know that when Jesus healed news traveled rapidly and many came from all over to hear Him and to be healed by Him. You would think that might pique the interest of local law enforcement such as the centurion as to why the town was swelling with visitors.

But here's what I want to suggest to you today. It's difficult for faith to grow when we are not desperate. When we think we have everything under control and life seems good, faith can become stagnant. When I was hospice chaplain visited with patients and family members or when I did training for volunteers about the role of the chaplain and of faith in the life of people who are dying I would tell them that faith is never static. Faith never stays the same. We could describe faith like the tide – it is either ebbing or flowing, it is either receding or growing. Faith never stands still and when we become desperate our faith can grow.

Do you understand what I mean when I say that the centurion may have heard of Jesus before but now he really heard of Him? Let me explain through the story of Job. He was the guy who was really wealthy who lost everything in the matter of hours – family and possessions were all taken from him.

Then four of his closest friends came to mourn with him but in essence told him he must have sinned for God to have done something so horrible. Job maintained his innocence throughout each verbal attack on his character. That is until God had a few words to say to him. Listen to how he responds to God. Job 42:5 “My ears had heard of You but now my eyes have seen You.”

Job came to know God not just intellectually, but experientially. That’s how I picture the centurion. In a town that size he probably had heard of Jesus, but now his faith was moving him to experience Him, to seek Him out because he was desperate. Such faith is active and purposeful.

Are you going through something in your life right now that is making you desperate? Let me ask you then, is that situation moving you to a greater faith and trust in Jesus or is it perhaps moving you away? Your faith will never stay the same. *If your faith is not growing, it is slowing.*

Here is what his faith moved him to do. It’s right there in our text. He heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to Him to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant.

Am I the only one that finds it significant that a Gentile is asking the Jews to send a message to Jesus? Culturally they hated each other. The Romans and their army were the suppressors. They were the enemy. And from the perspective of the Romans there was no love lost on the Jews either. They had strange religious customs and dietary requirements. They were bigoted toward anyone not a Jew. If the Jews could have, they would have tossed off Roman rule. But that’s not the case here. Highly respected Jews of the community, though not necessarily the religious leaders, were willing to intercede for the centurion on behalf of his slave. And they pleaded earnestly with Jesus. It’s a word that means they came with haste. From this we get the impression that the man’s servant was very near

death. It’s the same word used by Paul when he hears about how concerned the Philippian believers were having learned that Epaphroditus had been sick and almost died. Paul was therefore eager to send him back to them so they could see him and be relieved of their anxiety about his well-being.

But notice the argument the elders use to convince Jesus that He should act. They say he is worthy of Your doing something for him. Now the Greek word they use is *achios* (*axios*) and is the same word used in Revelation 4 and 5 to speak of God being worthy of our praise and Jesus being worthy of our praise because He had been slain. They were putting this man on equal ground with Jesus because he had done things for them that deserved praise from their perspective.

I spent a little time at the recent Memorial Day parade walking by the vendors and spotted someone I knew from the community. He was working the booth for a local politician running for office and wanted to introduce me to the man. My friend knows I am a pastor and so made sure to tell me that this candidate was “a fine Christian man.” What he was saying was that the man was worthy of my vote because he was a “fine Christian man.” Now, I don’t know how he defines that term.

These elders were saying that the centurion was a fine man worthy of His doing something for him. Here’s why.

He loves our nation. They don’t define what that means, but we understand it to be something unusual given the general animosity between Jews and Gentiles. So whatever that means, it was something they thought merited attention from Jesus.

Now we might put that aside and claim it to be insignificant enough as a reason for Jesus to give attention. So they added a second reason he was worthy in their opinion of commended him to Jesus for action. He had financed the synagogue. That

ought to be the feather in the cap. That should be the icing on the cake. What they were insinuating to Jesus is that because you are a teacher and you have even taught in our synagogue, why, we even saw you heal another guy in that synagogue on the Sabbath, therefore you understand how important this man is to our community. If they thought anything would tug on the heart strings of Jesus surely it would be to include something religious about the man. True, he may be a Gentile, but he's got a lot going for him, and he's helped us out a lot. We wouldn't even have a synagogue if it weren't for him.

What is it you see in their request? I see a works based faith. He has done, therefore he should receive.

But saving faith isn't like that. How are you coming to Jesus? Is it based on your works or on His work?

Verse 6 tells us that Jesus went with them and had almost reached the house when they were met with another small delegation from the centurion. This group had another message. The elders had their opinion about the man that he was worthy, but the man had his own opinion about himself.

Let me just pause here and interject a thought for you to ponder. Notice that Jesus was willing to go. But the centurion was a Gentile. The elders were asking Jesus to go and willfully enter the home of a Gentile, the very act that would defile Him according to the Rabbinical law.

Acts 10:27-28 "Talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them, 'You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objections.'"

Those things didn't bother Jesus. In verse 4 the elders said he was worthy. In verse 6 the man says he is not worthy for Jesus to enter his home. It means more than just that he understood the Jewish law and didn't want Jesus to become defiled, after all he had sent for Jesus. The NIV uses the term 'deserve' where the KJV uses the term 'worthy'. It's a different word in the Greek than the one used in verse 4. The word here means unfit. He wasn't saying that his house was a mess and didn't want to be embarrassed by Jesus coming to visit. It doesn't mean that he was an unfit host. The word the centurion uses to describe himself has everything to do with his character. It's the same idea conveyed earlier in Luke when Jesus is out in the boat with Peter after he hauled in that humongous boat sinking load of fish. Peter fell down to his knees and begged Jesus to leave because he was a sinful man. In both cases Peter and the centurion recognize their unworthiness to be in the presence of Jesus because they know the holy character of Jesus and they know their own sinful character.

Then in verse 7 the centurion goes back to using the other Greek word for worthy. "I'm not even worthy to come to you to ask." He was saying that he wasn't even on the same plain as Jesus.

William Hendriksen offers this insight: "it would seem that, therefore, that the more the centurion reflected immediately on the greatness of Jesus, on His power, exalted majesty, holiness, and willingness to help, the more also he was ashamed of himself and impressed with the fact that his previous request had been unnecessary. So great is Christ!"

But notice here is where the man's faith becomes purposeful. Even though he states he is unworthy of Jesus to come to his home he still wants Jesus to heal his servant. Just say the word, Jesus, you can do that. You don't even need to be in the same room. Just speak. He doesn't even need to be in

the same zip code or State, or nation, or even the same galaxy. He can do that.

Faith is purposeful because it knows that we can't but Jesus can. Now I want to be clear that I am not talking about a health, wealth, and prosperity faith that is being taught today where if you believe it you will receive it.

The centurion knew that Jesus was his very last hope. He had faith, faith that believed in Jesus, faith that Jesus could and faith that Jesus would.

There are two important truths in Christian life that we need to remember and they are evident here by the centurion.

He knew who Jesus was.

He knew who he was.

Faith must be purposeful. It is more than an attitude, it is an action.

Faith moved Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldea's.

Faith moved Abraham to offer Isaac on the altar.

Faith moved Moses to go to Egypt to deliver Israel.

Faith moved Moses and Israel to cross the Red Sea.

Without faith they would never have crossed.

Faith moved Joshua to cross the Jordan River.

Faith moved Israel to march around Jericho.

Faith moved Gideon to shout.

Faith moved Peter to walk on water all be it briefly.

Faith moved the Apostles to stay in a room to receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

Faith moved Paul to go into unreached areas with the gospel.

Is your faith purposeful today?

Faith believes in the promises and faithfulness of God and then acts on those promises.

His faith was purposeful.

His faith was powerful.

III. HIS FAITH WAS POWERFUL – v. 9-10

What kind of faith do you have today? Does your faith amaze Jesus?

Do you know there are only two times in the Gospels where we read that Jesus was amazed? We find it here speaking of the faith of the centurion – a Gentile. But what an indictment on the nation of Israel who should have had tremendous faith in God. The people who should have had great faith didn't.

The second occasion we find Jesus amazed is found in Luke 6.

Luke 6:1-6

If this passage was written about you, what would Jesus say about your faith? And then how many times do we read Jesus telling the disciples that they had little faith.

D.L. Moody has been credited as saying “The world has yet to see what God can do through a man (or woman) who is totally committed to Him.” That is faith my friend.

The centurion had tremendous faith, but it wasn't his faith that healed the servant, it was Jesus. In his position as a military leader he had learned the importance of following orders both in receiving them from his superiors and in giving them to his subordinates. He understood that Jesus had the power to command whatever disease this servant had that rendered him near death and that the disease would immediately be gone leaving the servant cured. That same moment he is cured.

Jesus was not impressed with his credentials, He was amazed at his faith. What kind of faith do you have today in Jesus? Do you need saving faith? Do you need sanctifying faith?

Maybe our request of the Lord today should be the same request the disciples asked “Lord increase our faith.” (Luke 17:5)

Faith asks. Faith acts.

It is passionate. It is purposeful. It is powerful.