

June 6, 2010
Pentecost 2

"The Amazing Faith of the Roman Centurion"

LUKE 7:1-10

When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. ³ The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵ because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." ⁶ So Jesus went with them. 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. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 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." 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." ¹⁰ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

It says that Jesus was amazed when he saw the faith of a Roman centurion. Here was a Roman soldier, a heathen man from the Roman Empire and he had greater faith in Jesus' words than the Jewish people who gathered around Jesus to hear his words and see his miracles.

There are times when we are sadly amazed at how people reject the free gift of eternal life that the Lord offers them here in the pages of the Bible. When Susan's dad tried to talk to the elderly people who lived with him at Desert Point about Jesus, they showed very little interest in what he said. It amazes us that elderly people who are facing their last days of life on this earth show little interest in the salvation that Jesus offers them. Susan's dad often described their resistance as having cement between their ears.

But we are also joyfully amazed how some of the least likely people come to faith in Jesus and put their hope in him for eternal life. You simply cannot predict how the Holy Spirit will come into the lives of people and bring them from darkness into the light. Today we want to take a closer look at this amazing faith of this Roman centurion. This will help us see that the Lord is still performing amazing miracles in these last days as he brings people into his kingdom and gives them an amazing faith.

We see this faith in what was done

We are told that Jesus entered the town of Capernaum after he had finished an important day of teaching his disciples the words of the famous Sermon on the Mount. Capernaum had become Jesus' base of operation as he traveled through the towns and villages of Galilee proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. It was in this town that Jesus performed mighty miracles and taught in their synagogue. It was also in this town that

Jesus saw people reject him just as we see people reject Jesus today. He warned them it would be worse for them in the judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah because they had so many opportunities to believe and come to faith.

The people of Capernaum were blessed to have in their midst a Roman centurion who had come to believe in the true God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the true God who had promised to bless the whole world with a descendant of Abraham. This Roman centurion, this foreigner, had a servant who was very sick and about to die. The centurion was good at leading soldiers into battle but he was helpless when it came to healing the servant he loved, so he looked to Jesus for help.

When people come to faith in the true God of the Bible who sent his Son Jesus to die for us and rescue us from eternal death, their lives change by the way they show compassion and love for other people. This man loved his servant and cared about him because he knew the Lord. Through his contact with Jewish people, this Roman soldier could hear about the Lord who reveals himself with these words in Exodus 34: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin." The true God was so different from the gods of Greece and Rome. This man had come to know the temple in Jerusalem was open to him a foreigner. Did one of his Jewish friends read to him the prayer David prayed at the dedication of the first temple? "When the foreigner comes and prays toward this temple, then hear from heaven, and your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the people of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel."

This Roman centurion showed his great faith by the deeds of kindness and love he had for the Jewish people. He sent some of the elders of the Jewish people to Jesus to plead for Jesus' help. They were more than happy to do this because of all the kindness and love this centurion had showed to their people. It says that they pleaded earnestly with Jesus. They told Jesus, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." If you were to go to Israel and visit the site of ancient Capernaum, you would see the stones and pillars of a synagogue built in the fourth or fifth century out of limestone over an older synagogue built in the first century out of basalt. Do these basalt rocks stand as a testimony to the kindness and love that this centurion showed the Jewish people? When people die in the Lord their works of love for the Lord live on after them as a testimony to the amazing faith the Lord planted in their lives.

I am going to illustrate this point by asking you if you remember anything about a person in the Bible with the name of Dorcas. Her other name is Tabitha. Her story is found in the book of Acts. When she died the widows gathered around her dead body and wept for and showed all the clothes she had made for them. Peter then came into the room, knelt down and prayed and spoke to the dead body, "Tabitha, get up." With these words Peter was able with the Lord's help to perform a miracle that brought her back to life again. She could continue to sew clothes for needy widows and reflect to others the amazing faith the Lord had given to her.

In John 15 Jesus tells us that he is the vine and we are the branches. He tells us we are clean through the Word that he speaks to us. He also tells us that when we are connected to him as the source of our salvation we start producing fruit in our lives. We

start caring about people because Jesus first cared about us. We don't do good works to earn God's favor, we do good works because we have God's favor through Jesus' death and resurrection. We don't do good works to be forgiven, we do good works because we have been forgiven. The works are the result of an amazing faith the Lord has given to us similar to the amazing faith given to this Roman centurion.

We see faith in what was said

We also see the evidence of amazing faith by what the centurion said. He did not consider himself to be worthy of visiting Jesus and requesting his help. As Jesus approaches the house to heal his servant, the centurion sends another delegation, a group of his friends, with this message: "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." Notice that he calls Jesus Lord. You know the words of Romans 10 that tell us, "No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." This man believes with all his heart that Jesus is his Lord and God. He also considers himself unworthy to welcome Jesus as a guest in his house because he is a foreigner, a Roman, hated by the Jews, and certainly aware of all the bad things he has done in his past as a Roman soldier.

What if Jesus would come to your house what would he find in your house? I am not thinking of a house that maybe needs a little cleaning and dusting, but a home that does not always have people living and behaving as they should. What would Jesus find in your house when it comes to how you treat each other in your marriage? What would he find you watching on television or the internet? How much time would Jesus find you reading your Bible and devoting yourself to prayer? What nasty things would he find your saying about other people? "If Jesus came to your house to spend a day or two, if He came unexpectedly, I wonder what you'd do."

The man felt unworthy to have Jesus come into his house. Remember the man who went up to the temple to pray, the tax collector. He stepped into the temple of the Lord and prayed fervently, "God be merciful to me a sinner." And so we confess in our worship today, "Lord of life, I confess that I am by nature dead in sin, For faithless worrying and selfish pride, For sins of habit and sins of choice, For the evil I have done and the good I have failed to do, You should cast me away from your presence forever. O Lord, I am sorry for my sins. Forgive me, for Jesus' sake."

We see even more evidence of amazing faith by what this man says about trusting the words of Jesus. "But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 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." This man knew the power he held over the lives of people as a commanding officer in the vaunted Roman army. The Roman soldiers were so successful in battle because they obeyed the words of the commanding officer. They worked together as a team in battle and protected each other. The centurion was often the one who led the charge and provided an example to the men under him. The strength of the Roman legion was the centurion and the power of his words to drive his men forward in time of battle.

What amazing faith this was! He trusted that Jesus could simply say the word and his

servant would be healed. That's what saving faith is all about. It is about putting our trust in what God tells us in his Word. When God's word tells me that the blood of Jesus cleanses me from all sin, I can be absolutely sure my sin was all forgiven because of that little word, "all." If God's word tells me that nothing will ever separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, then I know I can trust that word. When God's Word tells me that he will raise me to live again on the last day, I can take that words at face value and believe it is true.

In Romans 10 we are told that we are saved by a righteousness that is outside of ourselves, found only in Christ. But then the important question is raised how do you find this righteousness in Christ? Do you have to ascend into heaven to bring Christ down? Do you have to descend into the deep to bring Christ up? No, it says, "The word is near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart." Think of the amazing faith that is your heart and in your mouth today, a faith that allows you to say, "Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so. Yes Jesus loves me. Yes Jesus loves. Yes Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so." That's the amazing faith of the Roman centurion. That's the amazing faith the Lord has given you. Amen.