

**Pentecost 2**  
**May 29, 2016**

*“Great Faith”*

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## **LUKE 7:1-10**

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*When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup> There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. <sup>3</sup> The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. <sup>4</sup> When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, <sup>5</sup> because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> 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 great faith of a Roman centurion. Jesus was not just amazed at this faith in a Roman soldier but he was amazed at his "great faith."

Today we want to take a closer look at this man's faith which Jesus calls great. As we do so we will gain a deeper appreciation for the great faith which is present in your life and mine through the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is a great faith which by God's grace our newly baptized children Samuel and Ezekiel now have.

### **Great faith has Jesus as its object**

To have great faith it is absolutely necessary that you put your faith in the right place, and that right place is Jesus. The Roman centurion comes to Jesus for help. That was the right place to go to have his servant healed.

Before we see how the centurion went to Jesus for help, let's take a closer look at the first verse. "When Jesus had finished saying all of this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum." We don't want to brush over these words because they are the key to great faith. People were listening to Jesus in large numbers. In the verses before this Jesus finished his great sermon on the mount with the words about a man who builds his house on a rock and another man who built his house on the sand. When the flood waters came, the house on the rock stood strong but the house built on sand collapsed. If you build your hope of eternal life on anything else but Christ you are lost. Great faith has Jesus as its object.

Now let's take a closer look at the faith of this Roman centurion. "There a certain centurion's servant, whom the master valued highly, was sick and about to die." We have hospitals

across our country filled with sick people. Some of them are about to die as this servant was about to die. Some who are dying have their hope of eternal life built on Christ. Others are foolishly putting their hope and trust in whatever false religion they have chosen for themselves. The Roman centurion valued his servant, not just as a valuable piece of property, but someone he loved and cared for.

Where do you go for help when someone you love is sick? Of course you take them to the doctor. Perhaps this Roman centurion talked to whatever doctors the Roman cared for the soldiers just as we talk to doctors when we are sick. Now this servant is dying. The centurion goes to Jesus for help. "The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant." It says the centurion heard about Jesus. When people hear about Jesus they come to know him as the very Son of God. They come to know him as the one who can deliver them from sin. They come to know him as the one who rose from the dead and can give them eternal life. The very name Jesus means Savior.

Have you ever had someone say to you, "I have faith in my doctor?" I have. People put their faith in their doctors to prescribe the right medicine and perform the life saving surgery. If you have a good mechanic you put faith in him to fix your car. You put faith in airlines and pilots to safely fly you from one city to another. It is important to have the right object of your faith or trust. Nowhere is this more important than getting rid of this problem of sin that shows up in our lives everywhere. It will destroy us forever on judgment day unless someone can remove it for us. I cannot get rid of it in my life nor can you. Jesus is the only place you can go to be healed of sin have it washed away. Your faith is great because it has Jesus as its object.

### **Great faith is displays humility**

The Roman centurion sent leaders of the Jewish people to talk to Jesus about healing his servant. He did not feel worthy to talk with Jesus. He didn't want them tooting his horn and bragging about him to get Jesus' attention. These Jewish leaders do not follow the script. "When they 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.'" These Jewish elders are asking Jesus to help this man because of all the good he has done for the Jewish people. Unlike other Romans he loved the Jewish people and even built them a synagogue in Capernaum. It's part of our sinful nature to think we can bring something to God to earn his favor and move him to hear our prayers.

Some years ago a large extended family on the East Coast won a huge sum of money in the lottery. They had pooled their money to buy tickets. One of the tickets was a winner. Later they were asked how they chose the winning numbers. One family member said their niece, a fourteen old girl who was very religious was chosen to pick the numbers. They thought her religious life and piety would help them win the winning ticket.

These Jewish leaders were thinking they could move Jesus to help this man by showing him all the good he had done. We think of the two men who went up to the temple to pray. The Pharisee said, "God I thank you I am not like other men-robbers, evildoers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get."

The other man who came to pray was the tax collector. He would not even lift his eyes up to heaven. He beat his breast and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Great faith says I am nothing. Jesus is everything.

So it was with this centurion. As Jesus went with the Jewish leaders to this man's house some of the friends of the centurion came out to meet Jesus with these words given to them by the centurion. "Lord, do not 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." Here is a centurion in the Roman army and an important man in the community. He does not think he is worthy of having Jesus come into his house. The words of the hymn come to my mind often, "Foul and full of sin I am. I all unrighteousness."

Any serious look at myself will always come to the conclusion that I don't deserve to be in the presence of Jesus. I don't deserve to ask him for forgiveness. I don't deserve to have him hear my prayers for help and healing. In the late 17th century a Dutch scientist by the name of Antonie van Leeuwenhoek worked with blown and melted glass to develop microscopes good enough to see little creatures swimming in a drop of water. He called these microscopic organism animalcules, a Latin word for little animals or creatures. Examine yourself under the microscope of God's words and you will find all sorts of things crawling around inside of you that you never saw before that are not pleasing to God. Great faith begins by realizing I have nothing to offer God but my life of sin. Jesus has everything to offer me.

### **Great faith takes Jesus at his Word**

This Roman centurion knew in his heart of hearts he had nothing inside of him to deserve Jesus' attention. But that did not prevent him from seeking Jesus' help. He instructs his friends to go to Jesus with these words, "But say the word, and my servant will be healed." To show Jesus how much confidence and trust he had in his power and his words, he draws attention to the similar but much lesser power he had as a Roman soldier. "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." Even soldiers today who hear the commanding officer say, "Jump." respond with the words, "How high?"

The powerful words that came out of the mouth of the Roman soldier were no comparison for the powerful words that come to us from the mouth of our Lord Jesus. Great faith takes Jesus at his Word. The centurion knows that Jesus doesn't even have to come into his house. He can simply speak the Word and his servant will be healed.

Great faith takes Jesus at his Word. Think of how blessed you are to have this great faith. Your faith trusts in what God tells us in his Word. When God's word tells you that the blood of Jesus cleanses you from all sin, you can be absolutely sure you sin was all forgiven because of that little word, "all." If God's word tells you that nothing will ever separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, then you know you can trust that word. When God's Word tells you that he will raise you to live again on the last day, you can take that words at face value and believe it is true.

What a blessing baptism is for all of us. In baptism our gracious God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit begins faith in us to believe. That faith is then nourished and strengthened. We become attached to the promises of God and we carry them with us where ever we go and whatever problems might come into our lives. The faith in God's Word that has developed throughout our lives becomes a great faith because it trusts God's Word is true and powerful. Martin Luther said, "I believe what God's Word says whether I feel or don't feel it."

Jesus was amazed at the faith in this Roman centurion even though he never made into that man's house. He turns to the crowd that followed him and said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." Today we worship our God with Christians all over the world. To each one of us our Savior can say joyfully and with amazement. Look at the great faith in these people. We can say this because such faith is a gift of God and God only gives great gifts. Amen.