

## Such Faith

### *Luke 7:1-10*

There was a man...the wrong kind of man who made a request to Jesus.

He didn't even come to Jesus in person...he didn't come himself, but sent messengers.

The man was the wrong kind of man because he was a Gentile, who wanted a favor from a Jewish teacher, rabbi, prophet and healer.

He was a Roman soldier who wanted a miracle from Jesus, the miracle healer.

He was not just a Roman soldier, but a centurion, one who commanded a unit of 100 other soldiers, who wanted a miracle from the great Jewish teacher and healer.

He didn't go himself, but sent Jewish friends to make the request. Yes, you heard me right. The Roman soldier, from the occupying army, had Jewish friends, who thought he was worthy of a healing miracle from a Jewish teacher and healer – one different from the other rabbis; the ones who served in Jerusalem.

This man, so unworthy, so pagan, this warrior, this enemy of the Jewish people wanted a favor, a miracle, a healing for his slave. Was this slave so special – if he died would he get another? The answer is that the slave was loved, respected and valued by the man, whatever his skills and abilities.

But the man sent witnesses: Jewish friends to tell of his character.

The Jewish elder who came seemed so sincere: He is worthy of having you come. He loves our people. He built our synagogue for us.

So the Jewish rabbi followed the Jewish elders to the home of the Roman soldier to have a conversation, see the situation, maybe even give the miracle of healing to the slave....But before the deed could be done the man, the Roman

soldier, the commander of others, sent word by other friends, that he was unworthy of such a personal and special gesture – NO, just speak “the word” or command and the deed will be done!

This man did not understand how miracles happen – shouldn’t he have taken a bull, sheep or goat to the temple in Jerusalem, lay his hand on the animal and let his request be known before the animal was sacrificed on the altar and his prayer heard!

Jesus said this wrong man, with the wrong occupation, with the wrong religious practices, with a strange love and respect for these who lived in the land his military unit occupied, and with great love for his slave; showed such faith that he had not known in the people of Israel, the right people!

Without another word, without the examination of the sick slave, without words of gratitude and acknowledgement of his generosity to the Jewish people – the deed was done. The request was answered. The slave was healed. The man, the wrong man, had his prayer answered.

In our scripture the preaching had ended. The service began. Jesus concluded his Sermon on the Plain with the admonition that his followers hear his words *and act on them*. Anyone who heard and did not act on the word built a house without a foundation, one that would wash away in the next flood (6:49). Jesus encouraged his listeners to put the words into action. Jesus proceeded from one town to the next, healing and raising the dead. The words of his own sermon called him to action. So Jesus concluded his Sermon on the Plain, left for Capernaum, and heard the news of a Roman centurion's slave who was ill and close to death. It is a fascinating encounter, but how do we understand the text? **Dena L. Williams**

Do we emphasize the centurion's faith in Jesus? Given his Roman background and his task as a soldier of the empire, he seems an unlikely candidate for faith in

Jesus. The centurion was almost everything the Christ is not; yet he had a beloved slave who was deathly ill, and Jesus presented a possibility for healing.

Desperation and faith often walk the same road. When we are at the end of our own resources, we may look for strength in surprising places. While the centurion stayed at home, he sent intermediaries to ask Jesus' help.

The Roman centurion sent his Jewish friends to ask for Jesus' help. In fact, the more we hear about the centurion, the more we like him. The Jewish elders who went to Jesus could not say enough good things about him. He had built the Jewish synagogue; he "has loved our people." There was no doubt in the minds of Jewish elders that Jesus should heal the slave.

Jesus was convinced. He left where he was and began the journey to see the slave and the centurion. However, the trip was stopped by the words of another group of emissaries for the soldier. Through these friends, the centurion confessed how unworthy he felt and said that if Jesus simply spoke the words of healing, the slave would be well. The centurion understood the authority and the power of words. Words made things happen, and the words of Jesus, even spoken at a physical distance, would bring restored health to the slave.

Perhaps, more central to the story is the amazement at the faith of the centurion. "I tell you," Jesus said to the crowd around him, "not even in Israel have I found such faith" ([v. 9](#)).

This is a text about faith. It is not about the polished profession of faith that we often look for in our churches. In fact, we read this story not knowing just how much of a believer the centurion was. Did he know the right words to say about who Jesus is? Do his words qualify him for membership in one of our churches?

Those questions seemed to be irrelevant to Jesus. Here was a centurion who believed that the Christ had words that could bring wholeness even in the brokenness of his own life. In a way, this story reminds us not only about faith but

also about how closely faith is connected to the grace of God. Do any of us ever fully understand who this one sent from God is? Are any of us gifted enough with understanding that we can wrap our minds around all that Jesus reveals of God?

If the human connection with the Divine is dependent on the strength of our faith at any moment, then our relationship rises and falls with the shifting sands of circumstances and personal moods. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8).

It is a strange mix of God's unmerited favor (grace) and our response to the divine initiative (faith). It is never either/or. It is not all God or all us. It is both/and. The gift is offered by the Holy One, but like all gifts, the gift is received or rejected. The gift is never forced.

Is this encounter with the centurion the way that God always deals with us? That has not been my experience. But when we trust in God, not doubting; prayers get answered. When we ask in humility and for the welfare of others; God honors and answers our prayers.

Was the centurion's faith response as clear or pristine as we may like? Probably not! But neither is the response of most of us as undiluted as we may like. We believe, but we ask God to love us at our places of unbelief. What matters, ultimately, is that somebody who was broken has been made whole. For that we give thanks to God! **Charles Bugg**

May such faith be found in us!

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