

# What is Faith? Faith as recognition. Faith brings reward.

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning and welcome. It's really great to have you join with us. It's great to be able to welcome old friends and new friends to hear God's Word and to worship together.

Just a reminder for those of us who are regular parts of the church, there's digital tea and coffee at 12. You can find the details of who's hosting through the email or on Elvanto.

Also, let me give you a special invitation to come back this evening at 5.30. As we used to do when we met physically, we are having a Buclue family praise evening.

And that's going to be possible to watch and share together on Zoom. So it'll be on YouTube, but we can watch it together and interact together. And again, the details of that are on the email.

So please do, if you can, make an effort to tune in and share that together. Our call to worship this morning, it comes from Psalm 57.

[ 1 : 10 ] It comes from King David. King David, who was running for his life and hiding in a cave. I cry out to God most high, to God who vindicates me.

He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me. God sends forth his love and his faithfulness.

Faith cries out in need. And we do so in the hope and the knowledge that God hears.

The God of love and faithfulness hears us when we pray. So we meet in his presence together, wherever you are. Now, let's hear in God's words.

Let's hear Matthew chapter 8, verses 5 to 13. And we'll think about faith here in the story of a Roman centurion.

[ 2 : 19 ] Matthew chapter 8 from verse 5. When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him asking for help.

Lord, he said, my servant lies at home paralysed, suffering terribly. Jesus said to him, shall I come and heal him? The centurion replied, Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.

But just 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. When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

[ 3 : 29 ] But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then Jesus said to the centurion, go, let it be done just as you believed it would.

And his servant was healed at that moment. So we're continuing to think about what is faith. And today, it's seeing faith as recognition.

And also seeing that faith brings reward. Now, I was thinking this week about a visit that we made to a classroom where 30 primary ones, including our own, were all present and correct.

And I remember being amazed and, to be honest, in awe of the teacher who had this quiet but calm voice of authority that with certain words and with certain gestures, she could calm a rabble.

And I guess many of us as parents, we wish we had that. The voice of authority. Words that carry weight.

[ 4 : 58 ] Do you know that person? You think about sort of different workplace settings. Think about classrooms that you've been in. Perhaps in your family, you know someone with the voice of authority.

Today, we're reading about a Roman soldier with a significant amount of authority working for the most powerful emperor in the world.

But he is somebody who, with his level of authority, recognises a greater authority, recognises the absolute authority of Jesus and especially the authority of Jesus' words.

Now, we see a man who recognises the authority, the glory of Jesus, who acts on that and who then receives reward for his faith.

And so as we look at this story briefly, we're going to see both the comfort and the challenge that we find in the authority of Jesus.

[ 6 : 02 ] So let's begin with recognition. Faith recognises the authority of Jesus. If you tuned in last week, you might remember that we were thinking about the faith of a leper.

Well, now here in this story of the Roman soldier, we find another religious and social outsider who has faith. He is part of the occupying army.

To most Israelites, he is the enemy. His task was to keep the people down, to enforce Roman rule and to keep them in order. But he's not your typical centurion.

You read your history books, you find centurions who dealt with oppressed people harshly. But this man shows respect. He comes to Jesus asking for help and he says, Lord.

He also shows his own weakness, a powerful man, but he comes looking for help. And he comes looking for help for a servant who is suffering.

[ 7 : 02 ] He cares for someone who is under him, who is much lower in status than him. He reminds us in this, that faith recognises our inability, our need and looks to Jesus for help, looks to Jesus for salvation.

So having come for help, having explained the situation, Jesus then asks a surprising question.

Verse seven, shall I come and heal him?

Reminds me of when a blind man came to Jesus looking for help and Jesus said to him, what is it that you would have me to do? Here is Jesus drawing out the centurion's faith, making it absolutely clear that Jesus and Jesus alone must be the object and the foundation of any faith that hopes to stand and have strength.

And having been asked to show his faith, we are given to see what the Roman soldier recognises about Jesus. We see the faith of this soldier.

So he began talking about how the Roman Empire's structure and particularly his understanding of the army and its authority structure.

[ 8 : 23 ] So the way it worked, the emperor was top dog and he would issue commands and orders to the commanders. And then those would filter down to the centurions who would then pass those on to the everyday soldiers.

So as the centurion looks at this, he understands he's under authority and then to those below the centurion, he becomes the voice of Rome.

He becomes the voice of the emperor. So he is to be obeyed on the basis, not of his own authority, but on the authority of the emperor. So he applies all this logic to Jesus and he understands Jesus outranks him.

Jesus outranks the emperor. And as a result of that, we find a man who is humble. Did you notice in verse eight, he said, I don't deserve to have you come under my roof because of Jesus' far superior and ultimate authority.

But he knows this. He knows that Jesus speaks. When Jesus speaks, God speaks. Because Jesus has the authority of God.

[ 9 : 38 ] And if Jesus speaks into the need of his servant, healing will come. So he has faith that recognises the authority of Jesus.

At this point, let me ask you the question. Have you come to recognise Jesus' authority over your life?

Consider the next couple of minutes a spiritual eye test to check how is your vision. First question to ask is this one.

Do you see that you need Jesus? Here, this Roman centurion who is powerful, who is no doubt wealthy, who has a degree of social status, he comes with humility.

He comes to Jesus as king, appealing for help and for mercy. For you and me today, do we see that we need Jesus? Do we recognise that the guilt and sin in our lives, do we recognise that without Jesus, we stand under God's just judgement, that without Jesus, we are spiritually dead and that

we are enemies of God.

[10:58] So we need Jesus to forgive us and to set us free. Do you recognise that you need Jesus to change your status, to move you from being spiritually dead to having spiritual life?

It's a move from being an enemy to becoming a child of God. Do you appreciate that you need Jesus if you are to grow in love for God and others, if you are to grow in obedience to God as we are called to do?

We can't do that on our own strength. We need Jesus, the spirit of Jesus in us to help us to grow in that. As we become aware of our weakness, do we see that we need Jesus as our source of strength, the one person that will never fail, leave or disappoint us?

In our fear and anxiety, do we see our need of Jesus to bring true and lasting hope and peace and deliverance?

Do you see that you need Jesus? Do you see also Jesus' authority over your life? When we read through the pages of the Bible, we discover that we are made by God in the image of God and in the New Testament, we discover that Jesus is God's agent of creation.

[12:19] He is the son of God, so he is actively involved in creating the world and creating us. Jesus is our Lord and our King. Whether we recognise that or not, whether we are glad to hear that or not, doesn't change that reality.

So that we actually have a duty to believe. We have a duty to follow Jesus. When we hear the gospel that tells us that we are sinful and that we need a saviour and Jesus has come to be that saviour and through his life and death and resurrection, the way to peace with God has been opened up to us.

We have a duty to believe, to put our faith in Jesus. You know, the centurion could have stood on the sidelines and said, well, Jesus, faith in Jesus, that's for them, that's for the religious folks, but it's not for me.

But he doesn't do that and nor should we. The centurion could have said, well, look at my past. I've done terrible things as a soldier and I've hurt people and I've been cruel, but he doesn't do that. Knowing his past, he still comes to Jesus in faith and so should we. He could have said, well, in relative terms, I'm a nobody and Jesus has every right to just walk on by.

[13:43] But he has faith. When we understand that God is all powerful and all knowing, it teaches us that there can be no little people, that everybody matters, that your obedience matters to Jesus.

So do you see Jesus' authority over your life? And one last question before we move on. Do you seek mercy for others from Jesus as Lord?

This is interesting, isn't it? The centurion doesn't come for himself. He comes for his servant. He wants mercy for somebody he cares about. Faith leads us to pray for others.

As we find mercy from God ourselves, we want others to enjoy that. As we come to know the love of God in Jesus, we want that for others.

And so we pray and we share. Knowing that Jesus is strong and kind, we ask that he would reveal himself in that way to others also.

[14:52] And we're going to do that in a few minutes. We'll pray for others. So there's recognition. Faith recognises the authority of Jesus.

But we also find in this passage, in this story, reward. That faith brings rewards from Jesus. In verse 10, we find another surprising statement, this time a statement about Jesus.

When Jesus heard the centurion's words, we're told in verse 10, he was amazed. Here is a reminder reminder that Jesus is fully God, but he's also fully human.

He became one of us. And as such, he has a full range of human emotions. And as such, he is amazed. Now, why is he amazed? He's amazed because I've not found anyone in Israel with such great faith, he says.

So, Israel, the people who had the Old Testament part of the Bible, who had God's promises, who God had entered into a covenant relationship with, they had the whole story of God's salvation.

[16:07] But they didn't have faith like the centurion. This outsider had great faith. Maybe he didn't know much, but he saw Jesus, and he trusted.

That's really important for you and me today to understand. It's not how much you and I know. Christianity is not based on knowledge.

The key thing is, what are you doing with what you know about Jesus? If you know that he is God's son, that he is your saviour, the saviour that you need, if you know that he died on the cross to save

sinner, and you know that you're a sinner, then believe that, act on it, respond in faith.

So we're thinking about reward. One reward that we see is that Jesus brings present help. If we go to our last verse, verse 13, Jesus said to the centurion, go, let it be done just as you believed it would.

And his servant was healed at that moment. The centurion has faith, and his servant is healed instantly with a word. Jesus brings the authority of God in his words.

[ 17 : 36 ] This is the same Jesus who spoke and stilled a storm. This is Jesus who spoke and caused evil spirits to depart. This is the same Jesus who spoke and raised the dead.

His words have authority, so he brings the authority of God and he brings the love of God to bear in this situation, in this crisis.

and isn't this our greatest need today and every day in every situation to have God's authority and love come to bear on our lives and so we pray for ourselves and for others.

So one reward is that we enjoy the help of God in the present, just like the centurion. But another reward is that Jesus here promises future reward to those with faith.

There's a popular interview question maybe when a newspaper or a magazine is interviewing a celebrity to get to know a little bit more about them. Sometimes even in job interviews the question is asked if you can invite three people to a dinner party either dead or alive who would you choose and why?

[ 18 : 58 ] Psychologists love that kind of story that he's going revealing. Who would we choose to share a meal with? For a religious Jew in Jesus' day in a sense that was an easy question to answer.

Who would they choose? Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Why choose them? Because if you're eating a meal with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob it's a sign that you are enjoying the promised feast in the kingdom of God.

It is the sign that you have entered into glory. That you are enjoying life in the presence of God enjoying all the blessing that he had always promised to his people.

Now Jesus is going to take this and he's going to provide amazing comfort thinking about the feast of God but he's also going to provide a shocking challenge.

He's going to say to all his hearers that there are important lessons to learn about faith and about the authority of Jesus. In verse 11 Jesus says with his authority I say to you that many will come from the east and west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

[ 20 : 16 ] There's a surprising guest list. People from all the corners of the globe will be part of God's kingdom. God's grace opens up the invitation, removes the barriers that had previously been there by making clear that the only qualification is faith in Jesus.

The centurion stands as proof for us that all we need is faith in Jesus. faith in God's kingdom. So whoever you are today, one of the wonderful things about technology is that it connects us in different places and with different stories and with different backgrounds.

Whoever you are today, wherever you are, whatever your story, there is a promise that if you believe on the Lord Jesus, you will be saved.

No qualifications on that. Believe in who Jesus is and what he has done and you will find forgiveness. You will receive new life from God and with God.

You will have the promise of entry into the world we all want, a glorious world without sickness and pain and disease and suffering and death, a place of love and joy and peace that lasts forever.

[ 21 : 45 ] forever. You will find entry into the life that you were made for and all you need to do is believe. But just as there is that wonderful comfort that's open to us today, there is also a challenge in Jesus' words.

Addressed particularly to the self-reliant and the religious, Jesus said, the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

They will find themselves not on the inside, but thrown out of the feast and on the outside eternally. Theirs will be loneliness and not fellowship with God and his people.

Their experience will be darkness and not light. It will be untold horror and not wonderful joy. It will be judgment and not reward.

This is the king's loving warning. Your future depends on your response to Jesus, who is your king.

[ 23 : 01 ] Respond with faith and you can look forward to that wonderful feast. But respond with unbelief. and face the certain prospect of eternal judgment.

You and I want happiness. Blaise Pascal said that we are motivated in everything by a desire for pleasure and happiness. And even in the midst of COVID-19 and the lockdown, we see that. For some, there has been a return to simple pleasures. So this week, beginning of the week when it was nice and sunny, we took a walk through the weeds as we happened to do and we gave the boys a chance to paddle in the stream.

And as we carried on on our way, we saw family after family doing exactly the same thing. So we're returning to simple pleasures. Others are finding creative new hobbies, finding pleasure and skill in learning new musical instruments or taking up art or crafts or something like that.

But then there are others who are feeling robbed of pleasure, who are feeling grief and sadness and loss.

[ 24 : 18 ] for all of us, there is one question of huge importance and it's this, how can you and I, made for happiness, be truly happy?

How can we find a joy that will last and that will not fail? And this is found in Jesus. Jesus promises and he has the authority to promise eternal happiness.

If you will see his glory today, glory as God's son and as God's promised saviour, if you will listen to his invitation to come to him, if you're weary, if you're burdened, come to him for forgiveness and new life, if you will put your trust in him as Lord, then you can know a happiness that lasts forever.

Faith recognises the authority of Jesus and faith is rewarded with knowing he is there to help you now and he promises this wonderful eternal future.