

A Humble Faith

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[0 : 0 0] Loving God, what I have prepared is just a speech if your Holy Spirit isn't present in power. I pray, Lord God, that by your grace, only the truth would be spoken and only the truth heard.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I was choking this morning, so I brought some water with me. Forgive me. As we were deciding what we were going to preach for these weeks, George laid out a host of scriptures that we could kind of choose from, which were from the miracles of Jesus.

And the one that we have, if you want to turn to it, Luke 7, was jumped out at me, the faith of the centurion. Most of you know I'm a military chaplain. I've been working for about 15 years amongst the soldiers in the army and the special forces.

And so when the faith of the centurion shows up or any of the army guys show up, I usually jump all over that. So that's why I chose this one. I wouldn't say I stole it. I chose this one this morning.

Charles Spurgeon once quipped, he once stated that there's plenty of people in his time, there was plenty of people who couldn't kill a mouse without publishing it in the local paper.

[1 : 1 4] And he said that the Lord finds modesty so rare that he takes great pains in his word to record it. And Luke 7, 1 to 10 is one of those places where modesty and humility, Luke is taking great pains to make sure that he records it.

The story of the centurion's servant is a story of humility and faith. So let's start there. Let's look. I'm going to go right through the passage. Let's look at 7, 1. After he finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.

Jesus has been teaching all over the north of the Sea of Galilee. If you can picture the Sea of Galilee is in the northern part of the nation of Israel. It's, you know, all kinds of stories about that.

And so Jesus all along the north has been preaching and doing wonderful, marvelous things. And it says in chapter 6 that multitudes of people now, multitudes of people are following him.

They're just coming out of the woodwork in order to follow him and see what's going on. Word is spreading. And in this time, he actually, it seems that he pops in and out of Capernaum at times. So he comes in to and pops into Capernaum, probably to do some teaching.

[2 : 3 3] This is a small town. It's on the northwest of the sea. We believe archaeologists, from what they find in the ruins, that this was a fishing town. Although it was a fishing town, it had a synagogue, a place of worship.

We believe it's where the man with the withered hand was actually healed within that synagogue. So it makes sense that Jesus is popping in and out of Capernaum at this time. And archaeologists also tell us that this town had about a thousand people in it.

So it was a bustling worship center. It was a bustling fishing town. It was a bustling little small town. Now, I'm from a small town. My mom is here at the back there.

And if I did something bad on one side of town, my mom heard about it before I even got home. All right. Word spreads quickly in a small town.

Everybody knows about Jesus. Most of them, possibly even the centurion, has witnessed in some way something that Jesus has done. And pretty much everybody at this point is wondering and trying to figure out for themselves, who is this guy?

[3 : 43] Who is Jesus? And it seems like the centurion of all people, of all people, the non-Jew, Gentile centurion, is on to something as far as who this person is, who Jesus is.

And so Jesus enters, verse 2. Now a centurion had faith who was sick. The centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death who was highly valued by him.

So Jesus enters and there's this soldier. And the message, if we look through 7, 1 to 10, is about the soldier's character, not really about the miracle itself.

The passage spends its time looking at and describing the soldier's character. So that's what we're going to do. We're just going to follow through and we're going to look and focus on the soldier's character.

We don't know his background nationality. Most definitely was not a Jew, though. We know that. But a centurion could have been from anywhere within the Roman world. And there's pretty much a spectrum within Capernaum, according to this passage, of where we could place this centurion.

[4 : 50] On the far side, he could have been a convert. Can I get someone to close that door for me at the back? It's great music, but thanks.

On the one hand, he could have been a convert, a full convert, a Gentile, but ostensibly, you know, a Jew like everybody else in the town, on the one hand. He could have been what we would call an adherent.

At that time, they call it a God-fearer. So that would have been someone, a Gentile, who chose to worship like a Jew would, but really isn't fully invested, isn't going to convert and become fully a Jew.

And then on the far side, over here, he could have just been a soldier who was following the Roman customs. And the Roman custom was to recognize that the local religions are a force for good, and we just kind of need to leverage that for the good of the Roman Empire.

I can confirm that, you know, militaries have been doing that for years, for millennia. For myself as a chaplain, some of us were chosen to be trained down in America for religious leader engagement and religious leader assessment.

[6 : 02] So I went down to South Carolina, and basically what that is, is to learn how to assess the religious situation within the country, and then discover which religious leaders it is that we need to be engaging as a military, and what we need to be saying, what the message is.

And we're trying to leverage religion, leverage whatever faith is present there, as a force multiplier, we call it, for good. To kind of use and use religion as a tool to build peace.

And so the Romans did it, and for 2,000 years, militaries have been doing that. So he could have just been purely a soldier who was doing that, not out of the goodness of his heart, but seeking to engage towards peace.

So he's somewhere along that spectrum. Either convert, adherent, or just being a soldier. The facts that the passage lay out, I would say he's probably a God-fearer, but let's not kid ourselves, he's also using religious engagement to win over the local populace.

That's pretty much what we could understand about this centurion. Being a centurion was roughly equivalent to what, in the army, we would call a captain. He is in charge of, he's nobody's fool.

[7 : 15] Okay, this is the guy who is in charge of the garrison in Capernaum. He's got a century, about 100 people who are underneath him, 100 soldiers. So in this town of 1,000 people, he's the guy who is in charge of 100 soldiers.

He's a pretty important person. You know, it talks about the Jewish elders in here, but, you know, he's the guy who's in charge, really, when it comes civilly.

A Greek historian, Paul Abias, stated that what they looked for in a centurion was not someone who was out there looking for danger and seeking for glory. What they wanted was someone who was steady, reliable, and not over-anxious to go running into a fight.

They wanted someone smart to be a centurion. That's who they chose. But when this person was hard-pressed, they were hard as a rock. They were ready to hold their ground and die at their post, if need be.

That's who you had to be to be a Roman centurion. And the Roman army was brutal. We know that. The Romans were brutal. So he came through all that and became a captain, became a centurion.

[8 : 27] We find throughout the scriptures that centurions were men of fortitude and integrity. Do you know when soldiers are spoken about in the New Testament? They're always spoken about positively. Always spoken about positively.

So this is most probably, when we talk about the character of the centurion, he's most probably a shrewd, thoughtful, intentional individual. And further to his character, we see in verse 3, when the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him the elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.

And then we hear what it is that they have to say about Jesus. And the fact that he highly values, we go back to verse 2, he highly values some, at least some, if not one of his servants, all his servants together.

And when this term says highly valued, it's not like, I highly value this guy because he knows how to make my coffee. This is, he's invested in this person.

He highly esteems this person. And I don't know why most of the Bibles translate it like that, but he's invested personally in this servant, which is a little bit unusual for the time.

[9 : 43] A little bit unusual for the time. And his worthiness, as I just read, is witnessed by the elders. Verse 4, when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him, earnestly saying, he is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built our synagogue.

So they're probably not, these elders are probably not the religious elders, or the religious leaders at that time. The elders were those who were chosen civilly to act as judges within the town.

So it's even the civil leaders of the Jewish nation there are the ones who are coming and pleading with Jesus. And they say, like, he built this synagogue. When we talk about the building of the synagogue, the captain is wealthy.

He has more money than the soldiers would have. But he's not that wealthy. Building a synagogue would have taken a lot of his personal wealth to do that.

It hurt financially for him to have built the synagogue. So we see, you know, he actually, yeah, he's engaging as a soldier within the local religious populace, but, you know, he actually cares about this worship life.

[10 : 53] He's invested somehow in the worship life. And so we see here this man of integrity, this thoughtful individual, who's probably very intentional about how he goes about doing things.

He goes to Jesus through intermediaries. And so Jesus went along with them, even though he's going to the home, to go to the home of this Gentile.

As he approaches the house, even more friends, more of the friends are sent to him. These are probably Jewish friends that the centurion has, because they're approaching a Jewish teacher.

Tells you again something about how he's invested within this community that says his friends were probably Jews. And so they come and they approach Jesus. Now, these go-betweens are an important factor.

When Matthew tells this story, he doesn't include the fact that there was intermediaries there. It's not an important factor for him. But Luke includes this detail, that there was intermediaries that came.

[11 : 59] Because he's trying to make a point. Friends, when we look at the passages, the way the different Gospels tell, the different stories, the different nuances they give, any kind of differences, anytime you see a difference, it's basically the author, or the Holy Spirit saying, okay, knucklehead, slow down.

There's something important here that you need to notice. And so Luke is saying to us, okay, he didn't go himself, even though he was this big, important person, he actually sent people twice.

Twice he sent people. To go in between, because he didn't feel worthy to go up to Jesus. Luke is highlighting for us, the humility of the centurion.

He's highlighting the role of humility, in this kind of faith. And so the soldier highlights Jesus' word, as an instrument that affects his purpose. We look at verse 7.

Therefore, I do not presume to come to you, but say the word, and let my servant be here. And so the soldier highlights that Jesus' word is the tool that he uses to affect his purpose.

[13 : 07] You just saw here, like this microphone is a tool that I'm using to affect my purpose, which is to preach to you. And the soldier is saying that God, that Jesus' word is what he uses to affect his purpose that's out there.

And we see this throughout the Gospels. This interplay between Jesus and his word. They become synonymous. In the beginning there was what?

The word. And we see this throughout the Gospels, how in the scriptures are actually the very word, and that's where the presence of God is. And the soldier seems to get that.

In the military, in the military where I am, I'm a major, when my lieutenant colonel says something to me, tells me to do something, that lawful command is literally a law for me.

The word of the person in charge is the law. If I don't follow it, I get court-martialed and bad things happen. Right? It is literally the law.

[14 : 14] And so the soldier seems to get the importance of the word of Jesus. And I want us to notice, though, exactly how the soldier says it in the passage.

Because Luke, again, saying, slow down, knuckleheads. Let's notice something here. Verse 8. He doesn't say right away, I'm this big important person who says something and people do it.

What does he highlight first? I am someone set under authority. He doesn't have to say that. It's the captain. But Luke is, in quoting him exactly like that, Luke is showing for us, highlighting for us, humility.

The role of humility in the faith of this centurion. And Jesus marvels at the man's faith.

Humility is at the root of that faith that Jesus marvels at. You know this is one of two places in the entire Bible Jesus marvels at something. Usually it's him that's surprising people and people are marveling at him walking across the water.

[15 : 43] Next week I'm going to talk about the loaves, about the feeding of the 5,000. People marveled at that. This is one of two places where Jesus actually marvels at. He's here with respect to humility and faith, but also he marvels in his hometown with respect to lack of faith and their pride.

when he went to Nazareth to preach, what happened? Who are you? You're just a carpenter's son. Who are you to preach to us? Who are you to think that you're a big, important person?

And the Bible says that Jesus has famous words, a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown. And he could do no miracles because of their unbelief. So here, in our passage, he marvels because of humility and faith, and there he marvels because of pride and unbelief.

He says he's found faith like this nowhere in Israel. For all the soldiers' lack of the knowledge of Judaism as the religious leaders would have had or maybe these magistrates would have had, here he grasps the very heart of God's purposes for Israel and for the world.

And it points to Jesus. The one true God was active in the person of Jesus. He responds, and as he looks to Jesus, he responds realizing his place, which is not even to be in God's presence.

[17 : 12] And then because of that, you know, when he's at home, he's not able to do any works of power. Here, because there's a faith that he even marvels at from a Gentile, he's able to do a very unique miracle.

Usually, when Jesus does a miracle, he's right there. He's right there with the loaves and the fishes. He's right there with the man with the withered hand. But here, and in the ancient world, this is very weird, it's a miracle that happens over a distance.

He doesn't even have to see. He's so amazed. There's so much faith there. He doesn't have to see this servant. The servant's just healed. Luke is highlighting for us that dichotomy between those two things.

In today's lesson, a key attribute of the faith that Jesus is seeking from us is humility. The definition would be understanding God's holiness and power as a soldier sees and our place in response and in comparison to that.

Why does this matter? In a world of political and social and corporate hierarchies, humility can be a very tough sell.

[18 : 28] You know, I work within the machine here in Ottawa and I've got to tell you when it comes to public service or the military, humility can be a very tough sell. There's a fear of being overlooked.

There's a fear of being underutilized or overutilized by the machine and just run over by the big political machine. But this is important because humility cuts across that jungle, cuts across our false selves we buy into when we start playing that game and it opens room for the Holy Spirit to bring out our new selves, renewed, as Ephesians 4.24 says.

Cuts right across it, opens it up, humility does in faith, and allows our true selves to blossom. Jesus prizes humility whereas our culture is a battle royale of who has the most social merit.

Some people, it's just important that they be seen as the most powerful and the most important. And oddly enough, for others, it's a battle to see who's the most oppressed.

Because if I'm the most oppressed, that means I'm the most important voice. But on both sides, it's all about who's on the top of the heap and who's the most important.

[19 : 48] My kids are really, I don't know if you've ever seen this, my kids are really into people who stream video games on the internet. Have you seen this? It's bigger than sports, folks, and it's bigger in cable.

Kids aren't interested in that. They're interested in going on YouTube or this thing called Twitch and watching someone. It'll be up here. It's basically them playing the video game and a little box of their head up there talking to you while they're playing that video game.

Sounds funny, but it's a huge thing. Now, because my kids are into this, Amy and I are into this. Right? You want to kind of be able to be involved in whatever it is that your kids are into.

But something they always talk about, these streamers, always talk about on social media or on their streams, is something called clout. Basically, the more clout you have, the more people pay attention.

It's people paying attention to your social media or they're watching or want to watch your stream and so you become an influencer. And the more clout you have, the more advertising dollars you get because the advertisers want their little logo there and they want you drinking their Coca-Cola on stream.

[21 : 04] So it's just, they want clout. People pay attention to you. You get these advertising dollars, you get invited to the biggest tournaments, you get invited to the biggest conferences and the dollars roll in. We see them constantly grinding against each other.

I watch this with my kids. They're grinding against each other for this clout. And I think, you know, just to get more eyeballs, more eyeballs watching. And I think that is an image, we can laugh at it, but it's an image of our society at large.

people trying to convince each other of their social clout, their importance in the eyes of the world. And it's a battle to see whose voice is more important. And it is so easy to get caught up in that.

I'm a minister who works within a rank structure. It is so easy to get caught up in that. But in light of the gospel, complete nonsense.

Complete nonsense. It's an anathema to the message of Jesus. Humility is the root that our true selves and faith grow that of.

[22 : 15] Thomas Akempis said, the more humble a man is in himself and the more obedient towards God, the wiser he will be in all things and the more shall his soul be at peace.

Are you looking for peace this morning? Humble yourself before almighty God. That's where peace is found.

So what are we called to? I believe this morning we are called to a deep understanding of our place before God. A deep understanding that there is a God and you or I aren't him.

Not even close. Humility, friends, is a social, is a spiritual practice that we're called to. We often think of it, you can see in the growing of grace section or the to do section, we often think of humility as kind of one of the fruits of the spirit, something that grows out of our faith, which is true, but even more so we are told to put on humility, to be humble.

This is an act that the Bible tells us to do. A means of grace, a spiritual practice through which our faith is grown. And so I want to challenge us this week to practice humility.

[23 : 41] I wonder if we might prayerfully look at how we're managing our own image this week. If you journal, this is a perfect opportunity to use your journal. If you don't, perfect opportunity to start journaling.

Listen, friends, to how, I'm going to do this this week, I need it as much as anybody else, can we listen to how we talk about ourselves this week? Can we journal when we kind of spin the story about ourselves to make ourselves look better?

I want us to pay attention to what comes out of ourselves when we meet someone new. What do we want to come out? Do I want my rank to come out when I'm talking to someone new? We want to journal how we respond to praise or blame.

And any one of those things, just focus on one of them. And to offer to God those moments and ask Jesus to root us in his love instead, so that through faith and humility our true selves can blossom up in this world that needs you to be so.

We call this keeping watch. As Jesus commanded in Matthew 25, 13, he said, watch therefore yourself because you don't know the hour.

[24 : 55] Spiritual practice of living in watchfulness when we're constantly asking these questions of ourselves and our interactions and in our lives and offering those moments to God, that's walking in watchfulness, actually paying attention to what it is that we're doing in light of God in our lives.

we pray always for the desire to become more like Jesus who, as Jonathan Edwards said, is infinitely greater than us but also infinitely more humble.

Jesus humbled himself, I mean, Jesus is on high but he humbled himself to a death on the cross so that those of us who are humbled and faithful before him are raised up to our new selves now and to eternity then.

Thanks be to God. Amen. Let's pray. Loving God, we just pray for your presence. We pray that you would walk with us this week, Lord God. Help us to keep watch on ourselves by the power of your spirit and to know those times when we need to offer it to you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.