

Humility, Authority, Faith

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[0 : 0 0] we turn back for the next few weeks to our series in the gospel of Luke and we've reached Luke chapter 7 and verses 1 through 10 the story of how Jesus heals a centurion's servant Christian faith is often found in very unexpected places the years immediately following the media immediately following the fall of the Iron Curtain were difficult for the country of Albania its dictator Enver Hoxha had been deposed but when I visited there in the mid-1990s it was still a country desperately poor and very backward and yet there in Albania there was a growing vibrant and thriving Christian church I didn't expect to find many Christians in the capital city of Tirana but there were thousands if reports are to be believed even in some of today's repressive

Central Asian regimes Christians are serving in positions of high government curbing the the violent tendencies of vicious dictators and being the salt and light of Christ in these unexpected places for the religious Jews of Jesus day to find faith among the occupying Roman army was entirely as unexpected as me finding faith in 1990s Albania and in these verses we find faith in a very unexpected place in a Roman centurion and not just any kind of faith but the faith that goes beyond the norm what Jesus calls such faith that I have not even found in Israel now on the sense of things this passage fits well with Luke's broader theme remember he is reminding the early church that Gentile believers are to be treated with equal dignity as their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters the early church will have its shared share of Christians who are serving in the Roman army just recently a hidden cemetery was uncovered in

England containing both Roman and Anglo-Saxon burials the Roman burials were identified as distinctively Christian because of the east-west direction in which their bodies were positioned many Roman soldiers became Christians but here in Luke 7 verses 1 through 10 we find the first not a rank and file squaddy but a high-flying centurion the equivalent of of a captain in today's British army so this passage fits neatly into Luke's agenda for the early church to be inclusive of both Jewish and Gentile Christians likewise having just talked in the sermon on the plain about how disciples of Jesus are to love their enemies and refuse to judge on appearances Jesus is giving a solid example of how that works in practice because for a religious Jew there could be no greater enemy than a Gentile Roman centurion and yet Jesus loves him but this passage also serves to vividly describe what it means to believe in Jesus what it looks like to have genuine Christian faith the central verse of this passage is found at the very end where Jesus says I tell you not even in Israel have I found such faith there may be some of us today who wonder to ourselves what does true and genuine faith in Jesus look like there may be others among us who wonder if we have true and genuine faith in Jesus there may still be others who who want to have true and genuine faith in Jesus but really don't know what it looks like this passage answers all these questions but a word before we launch into dividing this passage studying faith will never bring faith studying Jesus brings faith so for all we say this morning remember it is the Jesus in whom we have faith who is of far greater value than the faith we ourselves have in Jesus all the way through our passage today ask and explore what it tells us about Jesus and study him the faith will follow soon after so having said all that by way of introduction let me suggest the following three divisions of this passage humility, authority, and faith humility, authority, and faith humility first of all having spent his childhood in Nazareth in manhood Jesus made Capernaum his home in Luke chapter 4 we read of the various miracles he performed in Capernaum including the exorcism of a demon from a man in the synagogue and the healing of Simon Peter's mother-in-law towns are the same the world over so it's no surprise that when Jesus entered Capernaum after a while away he was met by another request for his healing power but this time it was different it came from a group of Jewish elders representing a Roman centurion stationed there whose servant was sick the centurion highly valued his servant and so through these Jewish elders he appealed to Jesus to come to his home

and to heal him notice how the elders argue

in verse 4 and 5 he is worthy to have you do this for him for he loves our nation and he is the one who built our synagogue he is worthy to have you do this for him the centurion though he was a Roman may well have been what's called a proselyte a Gentile convert to Judaism we cannot but notice how he's described by these Jewish elders in verse 4 he is worthy by his actions he deserves a reward from Jesus by his actions the centurion is deserving of Jesus' healing power that's the way many religious people think of salvation we have to deserve it by our good actions our charity our religious diligence our status we have to prove ourselves worthy of salvation that's man-made religion humans reaching up to God and earning salvation from him it's as though we're reaching the gates of heaven and forcing entry standing there and crying out open to me for I am worthy I deserve it worthy is a dominant word in this passage the Jewish elders argued that the centurion was worthy but the centurion says different in verse 6 he says I am not worthy to have you come under my roof and then in verse 7 he says I did not presume to come to you which more literally translated is I did not consider myself worthy to come to you I am not worthy I did not consider myself worthy the Jewish elders so brainwashed by human religion thought him worthy the centurion knew different twice he says I am not worthy in the centurion's mind if at all Jesus is to heal his servant it won't be because he is worthy or because he deserved it he may love the nation he may have built the synagogue in Capernaum he may be a convert to Judaism but these things do not make him worthy of Jesus healing saving rescuing power so here we have the first ingredient in true saving faith sense of our unworthiness if it shall be that Jesus shall save us from our sins if it shall be that Jesus shall heal our broken hearts and give us the gift of eternal life it shall not be because we have deserved it or have earned it the ground of our salvation does not rest on our worthiness but on our unworthiness

[9 : 30] Jesus did not come for the righteous but for sinners he did not come to save the deserving but the undeserving doctors doctors doctors doctors don't exist to treat the healthy but the sick and Jesus came to call sinners to repentance not the righteous he came to save the unworthy here is the first ingredient in true saving faith in Jesus a sense of our unworthiness or as we might call it humility in our church tradition many fine Christian people never take communion and when asked why they usually say well I'm not worthy they're quite right and they're quite wrong they're quite right they are not worthy they are quite wrong not one of us is and the death of Christ for unworthy sinners is the only ground of our worthiness not one person taking the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper has earned the right to be at that table the only people who are there are the unworthy and the sinner and the undeserving there may be someone here today who shrinks back from commitment to Christ because they say to themselves Christ will not have me because I am not worthy I've done such bad things and for so many years I didn't give any thought to him maybe they were brought up in the church just like we said in the prayer turned their back in the church now I've come back Christ will not have me I've done such bad things this person needs to hear the comfortable words of the centurion words repeated in the

Anglican prayer book every time approach is made to the communion table I am not worthy to have you come under my roof but say the word and my servant shall be healed it is for the unworthy Christ came if we consider ourselves worthy of salvation then we have fallen into man-made religion in which religious exactness and our moral status reaches up to God and fails but if we consider ourselves unworthy humility to deserve salvation like the centurion we are where Christ wants us to be because only then are we in the right place to accept his gifts of forgiveness and healing so this first ingredient to true saving faith in Christ is a sense of our unworthiness humility second authority authority militarily speaking the Roman centurion was the most powerful man in Capernaum he had under him a large troop of Roman soldiers he also had servants and slaves and according to history was probably a very wealthy man Jesus had performed miracles in Capernaum and the centurion having heard of them realized that for all his power Jesus had a power far greater than his the authority of Jesus far overwhelmed the authority of even the greatest of Roman generals through friends the centurion says to Jesus in verse in verse 6

Lord don't trouble yourself for I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof therefore I did not presume to come to come to you but say the word and then my servant will be healed and then he says the most remarkable thing he says for I too a man set under authority with soldiers under me and I say to one go and he goes I say to another come and he comes and to my servant do this and he does it he introduces you see this idea of authority he recognizes that authority works from top

down he as a centurion has authority over his soldiers and his servants with a word he commands them and they do what he tells them if he wants them to go they go if he wants them to come they come if he wants them to do they do he has authority over them and they must do what he commands but that is as far as his authority goes the power of his word to command soldiers and servants to go to come and to do but having heard of the miracles of Jesus the centurion recognizes that

Jesus' authority is far greater than his it extends beyond anything that can be measured it extends even to human sickness and to human death as we'll see next week and although this servant is at the point of death the centurion knows that such is the power of the word of Jesus and such is the extent of his authority that all he need do is to speak the word and his servant will be healed for all that he's a military man and a Roman at that he understands only too well the limitations of military power but when it comes to Jesus there are no limitations clearly you can see the centurion has a very high opinion of Jesus not just of Jesus worthiness compared to his own but of Jesus authority compared to his own we've already seen this kind of reaction in the gospel of Luke in Luke 5 when Jesus miraculously causes a great shoal of fish to swim into Peter's nets

Peter falls to his knees and says Lord depart from me for I am a sinful man having seen the great power of Jesus at work Peter and now the centurion are awestruck amazed and astonished they realize that they're in the presence of an unearthly supernatural type of power they cannot control or understand a greatness and glory far beyond anything they'd ever seen so here then we have the second ingredient of true saving faith a sense of the authority and power of Jesus we are not worthy but he is we are not deserving but he is we are so small he is so great out of the two ingredients this one's perhaps the most important and why in the evangelical reform church we make no apologies for preaching about praying to and singing about Christ as our Lord in our service of union back in March we talked about how the followers of Jesus were first called Christians at Antioch and the reason for that is because they could not stop talking about Jesus they're forever talking about Christ and so they were given the name Christians how worthy Christ is compared to him all the greatness and glory of this world is as dust on a scale compared to him all the power and authority of this world is but a grain of sand on the seashore it's as nothing [17:21] Peter and the centurion got it and so rather than stand before Christ puffed up with their own achievements they fell before him confessing their unworthiness now there should be some among us this morning who wonder why they should come to Christ for salvation why should I come they say what's so great about Christ that I should give up my life for him surely he's just one among many great religious figures of leaders of history this person needs to just stand alongside the centurion and see the expression in the centurion's face of worship and amazement for there are none who can compare with Jesus Christ and if this person would just catch a glimpse of the worthiness of Christ and the power of Christ that instantly believe if they could see the glory of the risen and exalted Christ the angels behold him in heaven and before whom the angels bow down and sing he is worthy to receive glory and worship they drop their objection there is no one like him and when they came to know Jesus for themselves they'd wonder however they could have thought him unworthy of their lives so here we have the second ingredient of true and authentic saving faith a sense of the authority of Jesus his glorious majesty his great power this is heightened even more for us when we see this gloriously majestic and powerful Jesus dying upon the cross in weakness giving himself for the sins of the world we realize that at any stage of that crucifixion at any stage

Jesus had the authority to come down from that cross but for our sakes and because he loved us so much he did not and when we learn it was out of love for us a love which is entirely as great and greater than his power he bled for sinners like us humility, authority then third and finally faith faith these two ingredients of true and saving faith blend together in an intoxicating mix a sense of our unworthiness combined with a sense of Jesus' power they are inextricably connected the more we sense Christ's power and glory the more unworthy we feel by comparison and the more unworthy we feel the greater Christ's glory and power are by comparison these are the two ingredients as it were of saving faith a faith which you'll hear preached here week by week whether it's me who's preaching or anybody else man's inability to save himself

Christ's great power to save us traveling by road to Inverness about 10 miles to the south of the city on the east side of the A9 is a small farm called Dalmagarry there's a modern house on that site but behind it remains the original farmhouse in which the McQueen family live in that house 150 years ago a simply remarkable thing happened a northern minister happened to be riding south on his

horse and he stopped at Dalmagarry for the night while there he spoke with the family and then engaged in conversation with the kitchen maid the kitchen maid lived in a in a small cubby hole under the stairs like our cleaning cupboard just through there it's smaller the McQueen family who have owned Dalmagarry for hundreds of years still live there and a few years ago

I was privileged to look into that wee cubby hole where the Highland kitchen maid lived upon speaking to that kitchen maid this minister realized that she wasn't a Christian but she was interested and she wanted to be a Christian so she asked him for some advice and he told her that he was traveling down to Edinburgh for a meeting and in a week he would return but in the space of that week every day she should pray these words Lord show me myself Lord show me myself a week later when the minister returned north he found the kitchen maid in great distress because God had answered her prayer and she had come to realize just how unworthy she was before him God had showed her herself the minister then told her to change her prayer this time for a whole week she should pray the words

Lord show me thyself Lord show me thyself well it didn't take a week for the change to take place in her life and for her to have genuine and saving faith for almost in an instant God answered her prayer and she saw how worthy Jesus Christ was how worthy he is to save sinners like her and how the death he died on the cross he died for her the story of the hidden kitchen maid may be 150 years old it may have passed into Highland folklore if you ever want to see that cabbie hole just stop at Dalmogari Farm and speak to the McQueen's and say can I see the cabbie hole in which the Highland kitchen maid lived and made those prayers and they'll be happy to show you it it's exactly the same as what happened to this Roman centurion in the first century AD he was shown himself and he realized he was unworthy I am not worthy

[23 : 49] I am not worthy he was then shown thyself and realized how worthy Christ was it's in that connection between our unworthiness and inability and Christ's worthiness and ability true and genuine saving faith begins develops and grows it's as we realize that we're sinners before a holy God who have nothing to offer him except our weakness our shame our unworthiness and then we realize that God sent his holy unrighteous son to save us from our shame from our sin and from our unworthiness then we begin to connect the dots and commit ourselves to Christ and it's not merely an intellectual transaction as if something just clicks in our minds it's a whole person movement everything in us and about us begins to long to experience the fullness of Christ's worthiness everything about us longs to be forgiven and healed it's not enough to know that there is a saviour we move heaven and earth to make him my saviour we pray

Lord show me myself and Lord show me thyself until our mouths and hearts can pray no longer and when he answers he does something miraculous in us he works that very faith for which we are praying and just like he healed that centurion servant he heals us you know God's doing that in the most unexpected of places today he's doing it among people of power in parliaments and palaces among secret gatherings in repressive nations he's doing it among soldiers serving in the armed forces of nations which we don't as the UK get along with God's working in places and people we'd never expect and God is working in people who we'd never dream would come to him hundreds of thousands of Muslim people coming to Christ drug addicts in our city slums the question for us is this where are we in this story have we even passed the get-go the start line do we know ourselves to be unworthy and sinful before a holy

God and more importantly do we realize how worthy and loving that holy God is how much he wants us to come are we ready to say to God what that centurion did Lord I'm not worthy that you should come under my roof but just say the word and my servant shall be healed Lord just say the word and I shall be healed this Roman centurion challenges us as to exactly where we stand before God and my last question therefore is this where do we stand before God let us pray heavenly father forgive us for complicating your word speak a better word to us oh Lord this morning drive home to our hearts our own unworthiness and then show us the infinite worthiness of Jesus that his arms reached out to us embracing us in his love

Lord we thank you there's not one of us here today that you're not willing and eager to accept as yours and so Lord we pray that you would do your work of grace in us in Jesus name amen amen and kneel amen amen to you amen and amen