

Great Faith

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[0 : 00] Into the chapter we read in the Romans in Luke chapter 7. Luke chapter 7.

I'm just going to look at this. Jesus heals a centurion's servant. Chapter 7 verses 1 to 10, what we read. And we find, I'm not going to read it again, but there was this centurion.

Verse 2 tells us, a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews asking him to come and heal his servant.

Now as we know, Jesus was not only a remarkable teacher. We've been looking in chapter 6 at some of his teaching. And we found that his teaching was so radical, so quite extraordinary, where, remember, we were looking at, where the Lord asks us to love our enemies, to do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and so on.

So that the whole spirit of retaliation, which we are so prone to, is something that should be foreign in the life and in the heart of the Christian. Of course, that shows the transforming power of God's grace.

[1 : 30] It is only God's grace that can enable a person to live and act in this particular way. But he wasn't just a great teacher, he was a great person.

And of course, he had to be, because he is, he was, and he is the Son of God. And when you look at Jesus in this chapter, we find that it's his dealing with people.

And, in fact, through this chapter, there are four different situations, because we find that Jesus is dealing, first of all, with a dying servant.

Then a little later, he's dealing with a grieving widow. Then he's dealing with a doubting prophet. And then he's dealing with a repentant sinner. And I think it's one of the features of Luke's writing is that he emphasizes or highlights a lot of Jesus' personal dealings with people.

And that's one of the wonderful things about the life of Jesus, is that we see in Jesus this wonderful spirit of compassion, where he had a heart for people.

[2 : 39] And, of course, Jesus had and has a heart for people. Otherwise, he wouldn't have come into this world. It is because of the largeness of his heart.

It is a heart that is so full of love that he thought it, he who thought it not robbery, to be equal with God. He made himself, as it tells us in Philippians, of no reputation.

Where he came into this world. And where he came all the way from the heights of glory, all the way down to the fearful torment and sacrifice and punishment of the cross.

And that was because of love. Love is at the very heartbeat of all that Christ is. And so it's little wonder that as Jesus walks throughout this world, we see this love in action.

Jesus always stopped. Wherever there was trouble, wherever there was difficulty, whoever called him, he came, he made time, he came.

[3 : 42] And that was part of, when you look at the life of Jesus and you see this non-stop, as it were, ministering, ministering, serving, giving.

It's really quite extraordinary. And that's why Jesus said at one stage, he said, you know, the foxes have holes where they can go to. The birds of the air, they have nests where they can rest.

But he said, the son of man has nowhere where to lay his head. There was just this ongoing, as it were, non-stop demand upon his time, his resources, his energy, his vitality, everything.

And it really is quite remarkable when we see Jesus at work. And there is no doubt, but there are times when Jesus, because he was in our nature, although he was energized by the Holy Spirit, in a way and in a manner where we're told he had the Spirit without measure.

Yet there are times we see the exhaustion, the sheer, absolute exhaustion of Jesus. For instance, in the boat in the storm, they had to go and waken him.

[4 : 58] All the other men were beside themselves with fear. And we've got to remember, these were fishermen, some of them, who were used to the waters, who were used to the waves. Could they sleep in it? Not at all.

But they had to go and waken Jesus. He's so exhausted. He's so tired. From the constant pressure, the constant demands that his ministry was making upon himself.

Now, as we've said before about the compassion of Jesus, we've seen that description, that beautiful description about compassion. Somebody said, it is your pain in my heart.

And I think it's the best definition that I've ever come across. We've said it before. And that's what marks people who have compassion aside. Where they identify with the other person's pain.

Because that is not always the case, even amongst Christians. Christians can be quite hard-hearted, you know. And where people do not engage with others.

[6 : 01] They may at one level, but they keep it at a level. And they see a person's pain, but it doesn't really get into them. But there are some people, the pain that somebody is feeling goes right, as it were, in not just under their skin, but into their own heart.

Your pain in my heart. That's what real compassion is. We have got so part of that passion. And there's no doubt, whatever, that that was something that set Jesus apart.

Because he was somebody who became so involved with everybody. And as we said, as we go through this chapter, we'll just look at this one this morning.

And maybe we'll move more quickly as we move along. We see Jesus is dealing with this centurion and with a servant that was sick. But we've got to remember that before we move on, that Jesus is as compassionate today as he was then.

Because he is the same. He never changes. And that is one of the wonderful things that we're told in Scripture. That we have this sympathetic high priest.

[7 : 20] Wonderful thing. I think one of the most painful things is that if you are feeling pain, if it's in your body or in your heart or whatever, and you tell somebody and they're dismissive, you know it adds to the pain.

Rather than lessen it, it adds to it. Well, the great thing is that Jesus never deals like that. He is never dismissive of anybody who comes to him.

He is the one who is there. He is this sympathetic high priest. He enters in with them. And he's saying, it's the most incredible invitation.

Come unto me, he said, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. So we are to come with our burdens, with our pains, with whatever it is.

With our fears, with our troubles, with our anxieties, with whatever we have. And cast what we are upon Jesus.

[8 : 23] And cast our burdens upon him. Because he is still the great one who is inviting us always to come. But anyway, here we come to see this character that we meet, this Roman centurion.

And as we know, the centurion is a man who is in charge of a hundred soldiers. But he was quite a unique Roman centurion because he was a person of great faith and great humility.

And also a man who had a great love for the Jewish people. And normally, as we know, the Jews and the Romans just didn't get on. The Jews and the Romans, in fact, more than didn't get on.

They more or less hated each other. But we are told here that this man, he loved the Jewish nation and he had built them a synagogue. The synagogue that was in the place there, he had built them.

That is what we are told in verse 5. He is the one who built us our synagogue. So you can see that this man, although he was a soldier who had been sort of promoted to the point where he was in charge of a hundred soldiers, was also quite unique in the sense that he was somebody who had a great love for the Jewish people.

[9 : 40] And we believe also had a great love for Jesus. Because we are told that he was somebody who had heard about Jesus.

And that is obviously where his love for Jesus came. Because he heard of him. And that is why it is so important to tell people about Jesus. Because there are an awful lot of people who don't know about Jesus.

It is quite remarkable. But they don't know. You know what the Bible says, Paul tells us in one of his letters. How will they believe in him of whom they have not heard?

He is really saying, it won't happen. You cannot believe in somebody that you haven't heard about. And that is why it is so important to bring people under the gospel.

To bring the gospel to people. To tell people about Jesus. And that is the great work that goes on. And I believe it is the work that goes on in this town.

[10 : 47] I believe it is the work that goes on in this church. And you know the greatest form of outreach, I believe, is that quiet, effective witness that goes on week in, week out.

Where people speak to people about Jesus. The people that you work with. The people that you have a time to interact with.

At whatever different levels of life. It is the most powerful and effective form of evangelism and witness. And I believe so many.

And I know that there are many who do that. And I am sure that if we were to go around this church and were to do a time of testimony. That there would be many people who would get up and they would speak about how, as they think over their life.

The impact, the influence that a Christian or Christians had. Either in the home or at work. Or maybe in school or whatever. There is this influence going on.

[11 : 47] And that is how it should be. And you make sure, my dear Christian friend, that you witness to others about the Lord Jesus Christ. Not in a way that is overpowering and overbearing.

But using the opportunities that God gives you wisely. And of course, the greatest, the most effective witness of all, is a life, a Christian life that is lived to the Lord.

But anyway, this man, he had heard about Jesus. And that is so important. Now, we see the kindness of this man goes out to his servant. Because he had this particular, now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him.

But we see what this centurion does. He doesn't go personally to Jesus. But he sends the elders of the Jews. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.

You say to yourself, well, we don't say to ourselves because we read why. It wasn't because he was lazy. It wasn't because he was somebody who was used to giving commands. And he himself said, well, I'm not going to go to Jesus.

[13 : 03] I'll get some of these Jews to go. They'd be better at going anyway. That wasn't the reason why he sent them to Jesus. That's not the reason why he didn't go personally. It tells us very clearly why he didn't go.

It was because he felt himself unworthy. But it's very interesting that the one who thought he was unworthy was the one that the Jews, in fact, said to Jesus that he was worthy.

That's what we find here. The Jews who represented him said with the centurion in verse 4, For he is worthy to have you do this for him.

And yet this centurion said in verse 6, When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

Now, the actual word there means, in a sense, sufficient. I'm not sufficient to have you come under my roof.

[14 : 13] In other words, the man is saying, this centurion has such a high view of Jesus that he feels that he does not have sufficient in his home to provide for Jesus.

He wants to give Jesus. He feels that because of who Jesus is, that Jesus deserves the very, very best that can be given. And as he looks at his own life, and who he is, and what he has, he says, I'm not sufficient.

I do not have sufficient to honor you and to give to you what should be given to someone as great as you. That's really what he's saying.

Do we have that kind of view of the Lord today? Or do we kind of just take things for granted? Do we have this incredibly high view of who the Lord is?

What place do we give to Jesus? Is Jesus at the forefront? What do we give of our life to Jesus? Is it possible for some people that it's just this hour at the beginning of the week?

[15 : 25] Don't get me wrong. That is important. And there is no better way to begin the week than by coming to God's house to worship God. But if that's all that we give the Lord in the week, then we're not giving very much.

If we're saying to ourselves, well, I'm going to go and get this over and done with and give this wee part of my life and this part to the Lord, then that's it. Then I'll get on with the rest myself.

Then we have relegated the Lord way down our list of priorities. And the Lord's taking note. We can't fool the Lord. He's the one person we cannot fool.

And you remember that the Lord has given us, we read about it, for instance, in Matthew chapter 25, how the Lord gave different talents to different people. And there comes a day of reckoning.

And he's going to say to those, all the different ones that he gave, what have you done with what I gave you? And some, their life produced more and more fruit, more and more riches to the glory of God.

[16 : 35] Others produced less, but they still produced some. And each one received his reward. But there was, remember the one, what the Lord gave him, he buried.

And it tells us how the Lord left with him. You know, these are challenging things. We can't just say, look at them and say, oh, well, that was too bad.

The Lord is saying, no, you've got to face up to these things. What do we do with what the Lord has given to us? It is the most challenging question. It's one that won't go away. We can try and dismiss it.

We can try and bury our heads in the sand. It doesn't work. The Lord, as it were, is tapping away and saying, what about it? What are you doing for me? With your time, with your energy, with your resources, with your talents, with the abilities, with your finance, with all that I've given you in this world.

What are you doing? And I believe that part of what is happening globally, what is happening in this country, is happening because we have been given so much.

[17 : 39] And what have we given nationally to the Lord? It's at this stage, do we hear our leaders ever mention nationally, the Lord?

He seems to be the one person who is forgotten about. And is it any wonder that a collapse has begun?

It can't. As Jesus says, you cannot build anything. You can't build your life. You can't build society. You can't build anything on any lasting foundation but upon myself.

That's what Jesus is saying. Anything else will collapse. And we're seeing it. What do we give the Lord?

Do we give him? When he has done everything. He gave everything. He couldn't give more. He gave his life. You can't give more than your life. Well, that's what Jesus did.

[18 : 42] And what do we say? Oh, well, that's fine. And just get on with it and forget about it. Well, this man is showing us, this centurion here, is showing us what he thinks of Jesus.

You see, the Lord takes very seriously what we do with what we have. Find it in the book of Malachi. They never stopped sacrificing.

But you remember how they had started giving to the Lord what was worthless. They were keeping all the best for themselves. And they were giving the Lord the broken.

They were giving the Lord the maimed, the worthless. You can't fool the Lord. Will a man rob God, he says? You're robbing me?

That's what the Lord said to them. Remember the Passover lamb. They weren't to go and find one with a broken leg or the one that was deformed or the one that barely made it when it was born.

[19 : 45] You had to go and get the best. The one without blemish. You had to give the best to the Lord. Not the left over. Not the discarded. And it's still the same today.

The Lord's still requiring. That is why he says seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all the other things will be added unto you.

And so we find with this man here that this is the kind of person he was. He saw Jesus right up there. But the amazing thing was he saw himself way down there.

And he didn't see himself worthy. And you know my friend that's what always happens. The greater sight we have of the Lord the less we see of ourselves. It's always the same.

If we have a clear view of the Lord we won't think very much of ourselves. Woe is me for I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips.

[20 : 49] It's when Peter saw Jesus we saw that earlier back in Luke chapter 5. All of a sudden Peter was hit by the majesty and the holiness of Jesus and he says oh depart from me for I am a sinful man oh Lord.

Peter's cockiness Peter's sort of pride was broken in a moment there as he was stood in front of the holy purity of Jesus. and there's nothing that will bring a person's pride and a person's self esteem and a person's own worthiness down like a sight of Jesus.

And there's no doubt but that this man saw something of who Jesus is. And again we mentioned it I think maybe last week the law of return we see it here as well.

I can't but dismiss the like of that here as well because here is this man who gave to the Jewish people and he built on the synagogue.

And when he was in trouble what do we find? We find that the Jewish leaders are going full pelt to Jesus and saying please now this this is I would say well we haven't got it recorded but it was almost unprecedented because the Jews and the Romans hated each other.

[22 : 15] And the normal take would be if for instance a Roman was dying the Jews would actually be rejoicing they were saying well that's one less of the oppressors in our land.

But not in this case they're running to Jesus and saying oh you've got to if there's any person that you've got to respond to it's to this man. Please come and heal a servant because he's the most worthy passion of all.

We mentioned it last week the law of return. What you sow you reap. This man sowed goodness and we can see that coming back.

See everything comes back. Everything comes back. Let's be quite clear and sometimes it takes a while to come back but it comes back. that's what happens. If you are kind to people they will by and large be kind to you.

If you're angry with people they will be angry with you. Your life will be kind of like an echo. You know when you go into a big cave whatever you shout will come back.

[23 : 33] Not something else. If you shout in that cave I hate you that's what will come back. Somebody shouting back I hate you. If you shout I love you that's what will come back.

It's a law of return. And that's what operates. There is a law of return in operation. And that's what we see happening here. We see that so often in the Bible.

For instance the likes of Jacob. Jacob spent the earlier part of his life. He was a great deceiver. He was deceiving. All was deceiving. And then you look at Jacob's life and you find that in turn he was the one who was being tricked and deceived.

You know sometimes in life you will find people who maybe are living in a way that's maybe they're causing a lot of grief to people.

And then something happens to them where major grief comes into their life. And you've heard people actually say well it was waiting to happen.

[24 : 42] We hear that expression. It was just waiting to happen. The law of return had caught up. So we really have to be careful.

But as we were saying here talking to the young folk even our words it's a law of return. If we're angry it will be anger that will be around us. If we're loving it's loving that will be around us.

And that law of return is most clearly seen in Jesus. What do we do with Jesus? If we accept him and live for him the law of return will be altogether glorious.

If we reject him and put him away the law of return will be indescribably awful. What do we do with Jesus?

And then we find Jesus he makes his way in response to the request and then we see in verse 7 something again quite extraordinary therefore where this man this man had such a high view of Jesus therefore I did not presume to come to you but say the word and let my servant be healed.

[26 : 01] Isn't it amazing? This centurion had such great faith that he believed Jesus didn't even need to come to the house.

All he needed to do was speak the word and his servant would be healed. And he says the message he sent therefore I did not presume to come to you but say the word and let my servant be healed for I too am a man set under authority with soldiers under me and I say to one go and he goes to another come and he comes do this and he does that.

And he's saying of Jesus Jesus you're the same as me in this respect. You are also under authority the authority of the Godhead and all power belongs to you.

And I know this centurion is saying to Jesus all you have to do is say the word and the command that you issue it will be fulfilled. All you have to do is say to my servant or about my servant you don't even need to come to the house all you need to do is speak that word and he will be healed.

Do we have that kind of faith in the Lord today? Remember this Roman centurion lived 2000 years ago. He had very limited knowledge.

[27 : 25] He didn't have a full Bible like you and I have. He didn't have all the instruction manuals and all the study books that accompany the Bible.

He didn't have these things. We have so much but where is our faith against the likes of this? Do we have strong faith?

Do we have weak faith? Or do we have no faith? It's a very important question to ask. Jesus sees this faith as quite extraordinary.

And he says, I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith. Here's this Roman soldier. He's displaying greater faith than anybody that I have seen in Israel.

well, what about you today? Where do you stand in relation to all this? Because as we come to the end of another year and move out from one into another, where are we with regard to faith in Jesus Christ?

[28 : 33] It's one of the things the Bible tells us. Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith. Are you in the faith? that's the most important question that you and I have to face up today.

Are we in the faith? If not, then it's high time that we did something about it. Because you see, we're still on mercy's ground.

And Jesus today is offering himself, this Jesus of compassion, this Jesus of mercy, this Jesus of love, this Savior, is today offering himself.

There will come a day when the offer will be over. But today it isn't. Today this offer is as real and as relevant and as meaningful. And if you're today without Jesus, I ask you please, seek him with all your heart.

Go to him right now, saying, Lord, save me. And if you ask the Lord to save you with all your heart, he will. his word tells you that.

[29 : 42] Isn't that wonderful? He will. You go to him then and ask him to save you. And you ask him then to help you to follow him, to follow him in this world and that you will give to him the best of what you have.

And that's a beauty particularly if you're young today, of following the Lord when you're young. Because you give him the best of your life. The older you get, you know, it's wonderful to see people when they're old being converted.

But I have never met somebody who was converted when they were old but were regretting all the years that they'd wasted. Don't waste these years but seek the Lord with all your heart that you might know him and follow him and experience his future, his glory for your life.

Let us pray. O Lord ever God, we ask thee to be with us this day. We give thanks, Lord, for hearing about that great faith that the centurion exercised.

We pray that we also may have faith in Jesus Christ and that faith that will rely upon the Lord for things, for everything.

[31 : 17] and we pray, Lord, that as we live out our days and all the different things that we're called upon to do, that we might always be setting the Lord before us.

We pray then to part us with thy blessing, guide us and keep us in the way and forgive us all our sin. In Jesus name we ask all. Amen.