

Faith and Authority

Luke 7:1-10

Today we'll continue our sermon series on faith. We're studying seven key passages in the gospels in which Jesus teaches about faith. Our goal is to become people whose faith is vibrant and growing.

Two weeks ago we saw from Matthew 14 how Jesus diagnosed Peter as a man with (relatively) "little faith." By contrast, today we are going to consider a passage in which Jesus is amazed at a man's faith; His evaluation was that this man had "great faith."

As we come to this account in Luke 7, I want to ask whether or not you've ever considered the possibility that Jesus might be amazed at **your** faith. Have you ever considered the possibility that Jesus might notice your thoughts, or prayers, or actions and say, "That woman/man/boy/girl has **great** faith!"?

I'm convinced that every single follower of Christ can and should have "great faith." Today's passage explains that having great faith is rather simple. It's not always easy, but it is simple. Hint: great faith is about who Jesus is, not who you are.

The Centurion: A man with "Great Faith" (Luke 7:1–10)

As we'll see, the centurion was a rather unlikely person to have "great faith." His faith should be a great encouragement to you if you tend to think, "I could never be a person with great faith." Verse 1 sets the context.

1 When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum.

The "discourse" mentioned is the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Luke 6. Capernaum was a fishing village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeologists estimate that Capernaum had a population of about 1500 people. In verse 2 Luke describes the scenario that revealed the centurion's faith.

2 And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die.

A centurion was an officer in the Roman army who commanded about a hundred men. He would have been a Gentile (i.e., not Jewish). This centurion and his men had been deployed to Capernaum. In a town that size, the presence of a hundred Roman soldiers would have been rather imposing.

Luke mentions that this centurion had a slave who "was sick and about to die." Certainly sometimes slaves were viewed as property and therefore expendable. But this slave was "highly regarded" by this centurion; he thought so much of this slave that he was willing to do anything within his power to help him recover.

3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave.

This centurion had heard that Jesus had the power to heal people. It is possible that he had heard about Jesus healing the paralytic who had been brought to Jesus by his four friends. Moved by compassion, the centurion sent “some Jewish elders” (leaders of the Jewish community in Capernaum) to ask Jesus to come and save the life of his slave. As we’ll see, this man was confident in Jesus’ ability to heal; in other words, he had faith.

In verses 4 and 5 read how these Jewish elders appealed to Jesus.

4 When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, “He is worthy for You to grant this to him; 5 for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue.”

These Jewish men pleaded with Jesus based on the centurion’s character and track record of good works. I don’t think there was anything wrong with their appeal. They basically said, “Jesus, this man may be a Gentile and a centurion in the army that’s occupying our country, but he loves our nation (he’s really not our enemy) and he supports our worship of God (he funded the building of our synagogue). He’s worthy for You to give him what he’s asking. Please come and heal his slave.” I read this as a heartfelt appeal to Jesus on behalf of someone they truly respect.

Jesus was persuaded and started making the trek to the centurion’s house. But when He had almost arrived a second delegation sent by the centurion met Him.

6 Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, “Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; 7 for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

Whereas the Jewish elders said, “He is worthy,” his own evaluation was, “I am not worthy for you to come under my roof.” These friends explain to Jesus that this was the reason the centurion hadn’t come directly to Him in the first place. I don’t think this is an example of poor self-esteem; it’s an example of humility. He understood that Jesus was morally and spiritually superior. Since he had no claim on Jesus he was simply asking for grace and mercy.

It’s worth pointing out that not everybody who sees him/herself as “unworthy” has faith. Some people think, “I’m unworthy and therefore I can’t expect anything from Jesus.” Maybe you’ve thought this: “I have blown it so many times I can’t ask Jesus for anything until I clean myself up and get at least a little bit more worthy.” That is not the mindset of the centurion. The centurion had great faith/confidence in Jesus and His willingness to give even to someone who isn’t worthy. He said, “but just say the word, and my servant

will be healed.” He actually believed that all Jesus had to do was “say the word” and his servant would be healed.

In verse 8 the centurion explains himself further. It turns out that the centurion was confident in Jesus’ **authority** - Jesus authority over humanity and sickness. He believed that Jesus had so much authority that all He had to do was “say the word,” and it would be done. He relates Jesus’ authority to his own experience with authority, both the authority he lived under and the authority he exercised over others.

8 “For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, ‘Go!’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come!’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this!’ and he does it.”

First, the centurion explained that he was “a man placed under authority.” If his commanding officer said a word, he was obligated to obey; it would be done. Second, he exercised authority over other soldiers. He would say to one, “Go!” and guess what? He would “go.” He would say to another, “Come!” and he would come. He would say to his slave, “Do this!” and he would do it. Because he had authority over them, all he had to do was “say the word.”

In the same way, the centurion believed that Jesus had that type of authority over the sickness of his slave. All Jesus had to do was “say the word.” He didn’t have to show up in person and examine his servant; He didn’t have to wave His hands and chant some incantation; He only had to “say to say the word” and it would be done.

Notice that Jesus evaluates this confidence in His authority as “great faith.”

9 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.”

It’s a pretty big deal when Jesus “marvels” at you. This word translated “marvel” is often translated “to be amazed” and is found 43 times in the NT. In the vast majority of occurrences other people were amazed (or marveled) at Jesus; people were amazed that the winds and the waves obeyed Him (Matthew 8:27), amazed when He cast out demons (Matthew 9:33), amazed at His ability to heal (Matthew 15:31), etc. But on a couple of occasions Jesus is amazed or marvels. In Mark 6:6 Jesus marveled (“wondered”) at the unbelief of the people in His hometown. But here in Luke 7:9 Jesus marvels at **the faith of the centurion!** Finally Jesus had found somebody who understood who He was and the authority He exercised.

Jesus turned and said to the crowd following Him, “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.” You would have expected that those who lived under the old covenant would have had the greatest faith. They had the Scriptures and the prophets and the promises of God. When God showed up in the flesh, they should have recognized Him and exercised great faith. But this Gentile centurion had greater faith than anybody He’d found in Israel.

In verse 10 we see the effect of the centurion's faith: his faith moved the hand of God.

10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

This is consistent with other accounts of faith in the gospel; Jesus said to different people, "your faith has saved you" (Luke 7:50) or "your faith has made you well" (Mark 5:34). Faith moves the hand of God, and faith is most naturally expressed in prayer.

Faith is a confidence in the person and character of God. When we have faith, we believe the things that are revealed about Him in Scripture. This means that everything we learn about God in the Bible should add something to our faith. Since the Bible is first and foremost about God, we can go to the Scriptures and ask the question, "What does this passage teach me about God that can inform my faith?" Today's passage answers that question, "In every circumstance of life great faith is appropriate because Jesus has all authority."

"Great faith" is confidence that Jesus has all authority.

Honestly, I can't remember a time when I've known about more people at Faith who are experiencing serious painful circumstances and suffering. Of course this is hard to quantify, and I don't know what most of you are dealing with. But many of you are dealing with issues that are way beyond your control, things that you can't fix through effort and reasoning and being responsible. You need God to act on your behalf.

- Issues related to physical, mental, or emotional health.
- Relationships.
- Life-dominating sins.
- Financial stress.
- National/international events.
- Salvation of a friend.

Today's passage would have us ask ourselves, "Do I believe that Jesus has authority over _____?" In other words, does He have legitimate power to intervene in my situation, or is it beyond His reach? If you don't believe Jesus has authority in your situation, you won't exercise faith. If you don't have faith, God is limited in what He will do.

I am not implying that ***all*** of our trials can be traced back to a lack of faith. I've seen firsthand the fallout of people being told flippantly, "If you just had more faith, you wouldn't be in the mess you're in. . ." The whole of Scripture suggests that we should be very cautious in making such pronouncements. We simply don't know everything that's happening in either the seen or the unseen realms. We can encourage and exhort each other without taking the place of God (who alone knows the hearts of others and who alone knows exactly why we experience the trials we do).

Nevertheless Scripture is very clear that **sometimes** a lack of faith is what does keep God from working in specific places and situations. In Matthew 13:58 we read that Jesus “did not do many miracles” in his hometown “because of their unbelief” - their lack of faith. I have known people who have become so beaten down and disappointed by life that they’ve concluded, “God will do what God will do” - as if it doesn’t matter whether or not we are people of faith, prayer, and obedience. That is the opposite of what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that sometimes “you do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2) and that unbelief hinders God from acting.

God responds to people who have faith/confidence in Him - those who believe that He has authority over everyone and everything they encounter in this life. Our faith isn’t in some specific outcome; our faith is in God Himself.

When you think about it, this is how a person enters into a relationship with God through Jesus in the first place. In Mark 10:15 Jesus said this:

15 “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all.”

Little children don’t have power, money, intellectual prowess, or competence. They intuitively know that they can’t meet their own need or solve their own problems. That’s why they scream when they need something. They believe that the big people can do anything.

[Photo of Charissa] Here’s a photo of my daughter Charissa (who turned 28 this summer). I keep this photo on my desk. It reminds me of God’s great generosity toward me when I come to Him like a child. I would have done anything for Chrissy that was within my power and that was good for her. Why? Because she was my little girl. She would simply ask me to do things for her. Why? Because I was her father.

Jesus says that that’s the mindset of the person who receives the kingdom of God. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus, you need this type of childlike faith. You don’t have to clean yourself up and become competent and respectable and worthy. You mainly need to go to God like a child and say, “Thank You for doing for me what I couldn’t earn and couldn’t do for myself. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus You have paid for my sin. I receive this gift by faith.” God gladly gives this gift to everyone who wants it. In this way you become “born again” or born from above. You become a new creature in Christ with new appetites. You now have the Holy Spirit to empower you and lead you.

We enter the kingdom of God like a child and we **live in the kingdom like a child** in the sense that we maintain that same childlike faith in God and His authority. We don’t enter as a child and then think that God is now amazed by our competence or our worthiness or our knowledge. No, God is amazed with people like the centurion who had a childlike faith in Jesus. He believed that Jesus had all authority and therefore could do anything.

Application.

The application is really quite simple. **First**, identify a situation in which you need God to work, a situation that really matters, a situation that's beyond your control. **Second**, go to the Scriptures and become convinced that Jesus has authority over the situation that concern you. **Third**, exercise faith by praying in faith, believing that Jesus has authority.

Identify a situation in which you need God to work. Now you need to cultivate "great faith" in the context of that situation.

Go to the Scriptures. Find Scriptures that convince you that Jesus has authority over the situation that concerns you. Here are some examples.

- If you're dealing with some life-dominating sin, you're in a spiritual battle. You have an enemy who wants to harass you and frustrate you and make you think that you'll never walk in obedience. You need to know that Jesus has authority in the spiritual battle. If you read the gospels prayerfully and thoughtfully, your faith will grow. For example, Luke 4:31-37 - People were amazed at how Jesus commanded unclean spirits to leave people "with authority and power." Ephesians 1:20-21 - Jesus is raised up and seated at the right hand of God, "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. . ." And we have been raised up with Christ (Colossians 3:1).
- If you're troubled over international events and/or the political strife in this country, you need to be convinced that God has authority over kings and presidents and nations. Read Psalm 2 and Psalm 46 ("Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth."). Read the book of Daniel and see how God dealt with the kings of Babylon.
- If you're sharing Christ with someone, you need to know that Jesus has the authority to work in his/her life. That's exactly what Jesus promised in Matthew 28: *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. . . I will be with you always. . ."* Our confidence in sharing Jesus with others comes from the assurance that the One who has "all authority" is with us.

Pray. Exercise your faith that God has authority over the situation that concerns you by praying. Like a child and like the centurion, simply ask in faith. When I'm troubled about some situation or relationship, my initial response is often to panic: I play out scenarios in my mind, I try to figure out solutions, I do things that keep myself distracted, etc. But we have another option: we can **exercise great faith in the One who has all authority**. We pray in faith and we keep praying in faith.

This week, whenever you face the situation you've identified make it your ambition to exercise great faith, the type of faith that will amaze the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.