

Luke 7:1-10 *When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. ³ The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵ because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." ⁶ So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ 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." ⁹ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." ¹⁰ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.*

Dear friends in our Savior,

How strong is your faith? People talk a lot about the strength of their faith. Usually, they always talk about it as a comparison. "I wish that my faith was as strong as hers." You see someone who holds strong to God's love through a difficult and stressful time and right away, with a tinge of jealousy, you say, "I wish I had a faith like that."

What does that really mean? What makes a faith strong or weak? Why is it that we often feel weak in our faith especially as we face troublesome times? How can we increase our faith to make it stronger especially during those times that it feels so weak? We have the opportunity to delve into these questions today as we study our sermon text. And as we look at the faith of the centurion who approached Jesus, we pray, **"Lord Give Me Such a Faith as This!!"**

While many people want a strong faith, most are content with a common, mediocre faith. They are content with the dependable and reliable Toyota Camry faith that will get them to heaven, but not the Maserati convertible faith that will dazzle along the way. Though they might hope for more and perhaps even lament in what they don't have, they are content to settle with a little.

The Roman centurion in our text had a jaw dropping faith. I would imagine that it would take a lot for Jesus to be so amazed at the faith of someone. Yet, this was Jesus' reaction. He said, *"I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel."* A faith that amazed Jesus! So what made his faith so great?

Let's start by understanding a little bit about the Roman centurion. Usually, the centurions were the most respected men in the Roman army. Only the finest and most respected men were chosen for this task. They were so highly respected that when a centurion gave an order, it was followed immediately. There was no second guessing or questioning orders from the centurion. When he said, "Go," you went. You might think that this type of power and authority would go to someone's head. But as great as this man was and with as much power as he held, listen to the humility of his words, *"Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed."*

The first thing we notice about the faith of the centurion is his God-given view of himself. As great of a man as he was before other people, before God he recognized his complete unworthiness to even stand in God's presence. We don't know how, but this centurion had come to faith to see Jesus as God's Son. He realized that he would not only be in the presence of greatness, but in the presence of perfection and he was not morally sufficient to stand before Jesus. You might wonder what the centurion was thinking about. Had he recalled some teenage indiscretion of his? Was he reflecting on how he had treated his troops that week or captured soldiers they had fought against? While others, like the elders of the Jews, might have thought that he was deserving. He knew better. He had a God-given honest view about himself. He knew that he was a sinner and unworthy to stand before his God.

Who of us is worthy to approach Jesus for help? None of us! That's a tough statement. But in very simple terms, there is no one who is worthy—including us. There is no one who can in any way work towards being worthy before God. Sinful people cannot stand before a perfect God. If we take a realistic view of ourselves up against the standards of God's law, we must admit that not one of us matches that standard of perfection. The question really is, "How often do we recognize our unworthiness before God?" In words on Sunday we do. We confess our total unworthiness before God in the confession of sins. But what about in practice during the week after we leave God's house? Don't we often pray, "God, I'm in trouble. You've GOT to help me!!" That's not humility. That's bossing God around, demanding through prayer that God should stop whatever he's doing and tend to my needs. No, it isn't easy to approach our God in humility with a proper view of ourselves. We so often approach God in arrogance and with an attitude that we deserve his help. So often we approach God with a very high view of ourselves that says, "God you need to help me. Look at all that I've done for you." Our world aids this approach that rather than being indebted to God for our salvation, God is indebted to us that we have chosen to be

on his team. For these arrogant ways and all of our sin, we deserve nothing but God's eternal wrath and punishment.

What a faith the centurion displayed. Despite his position in life, he humbly came before Jesus recognizing his unworthiness. Lord, give us such a faith as this!! It doesn't matter who you are or what you have done, you are a sinner. It doesn't matter how faithful you have been or how many things you've done for God or how long you've been a member of his family, you are a sinner. Without Jesus, you have nothing. Without Jesus you are destined to spend eternity separated from your God. This same Jesus who healed the servant of this centurion has healed you forever before God. He gave to you a tremendous gift by willingly enduring the punishment that you deserve for your sin and rescuing you from the grasp of the devil. He has given you a marvelous gift of eternal life that he has promised is waiting for you and he has promised to watch over and protect you as you go throughout this life. That's grace—God's undeserved love and kindness to you and me who are unworthy sinners. And it is with this humble view of ourselves that we approach our God in trouble.

Is it possible that the desire for a stronger faith is creating more of a problem for many people? Is it possible that a search for more faith or stronger faith can actually be detrimental to our faith? Have you ever really stopped to ask what it is that is making you feel weak in faith? Have you ever evaluated what is causing your weakness in faith? Could it be that the object of your faith is not what it should be? Think about it. So many people struggle for more faith. But often the focus in trying to have more faith is in our ability to have faith, rather than on faith itself. We are so focused on the ability to have faith that we lose sight of the object of our faith. What gives our faith its strength is not our sincerity of faith or our ability to have faith. What gives our faith its strength is the object of our faith. If the object of our faith is the ability that we have to have faith, then it will be weak because then we are relying upon ourselves and on our own abilities. When we are focused on ourselves, we will always be weak.

Notice where the strength of the centurion's faith came: it's object. His confidence was in Jesus' ability to heal his servant. The centurion was certain that Jesus could heal his servant it that was his will. He wasn't confident that Jesus would heal his servant because of who he (the centurion) was, but because of who Jesus was. In fact, so confident was he in Jesus' ability to heal his servant, he trusted that all Jesus needed to do was speak the word and his servant would be healed. Jesus didn't need to touch the servant. He didn't need to see the servant or even be in the same presence as his servant. All he needed to do was speak and his servant would be healed. That's the whole business of the centurion saying to Jesus, *"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."* He was really saying, "If I, who am only a man, can simply speak and things happen, how much more won't that happen when you speak, Jesus?"

Someone once said, "Faith is not believing that God can. It is knowing that he will." That's the confidence that we can have in God's words as we approach him during the challenges of life. We don't have Jesus visibly present with us. We don't see him readily by our side as we face problems. What we trust are the powerful words of God, believing that he can and will see us through the challenges that we face. What is it that calms our fears as we face the challenges of life? The words of Jesus. And what powerful words Jesus shares with us in the scriptures as we face challenges. We too, as this centurion, are faced with the crises of death. Death can be so difficult. We realize when death comes how little power we have over it. As we see a loved one declining and heading toward death, we know how hopeless we can feel. Death is tough because when death strikes, it appears that death wins. We have little control over it. It strikes the young and the old. It comes quickly or slowly. It hits indiscriminately. But what comfort to hear the words of Jesus, *"Because I live, you also will live (John 14:19)."* *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die (John 11:25-26)."* *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23)."* *"Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:54-57)."* *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (John 16:33)."*

Can you feel the strength of those words? And what makes them so powerful? Jesus! We know they are true. We know what he has done about death. We know the victory that he won and we trust in the promises that he makes. We know the strength that he has displayed and that is his as almighty God. Our strength in faith comes from the object of our faith. And our faith as God's people trusts in his great power.

It's that power of God that sustains us as we face all the trials of life. Whether it be the loss of a job, a fall in the market, problems with children or family members, physical illness or whatever it will be, we can approach our God in humble confidence that he can and will do what is needed for our eternal good. Humble yet confident. Humble about ourselves. Confident in the power of our Savior. Lord, give us such a faith as this, and then what'er may come. We'll taste even now the hallowed bliss of an eternal home. Amen.