

This morning, I am in the ninth week of a sermon series that I've entitled "Meeting Jesus." I am making my way through Luke's account of the life of Jesus, looking at various interactions that people had with Jesus, in order to better understand what it means to know and follow Him. This morning, we are going to be in Luke 7:1-10, looking at Jesus' interaction with a military man and what it has to teach us about great faith.

**Luke 7:1–10** - When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup> There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. <sup>3</sup> The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. <sup>4</sup> When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, <sup>5</sup> because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." <sup>6</sup> **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. <sup>7</sup> That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup> 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.**" <sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

This is another story of Jesus healing someone, but the main reason Luke tells this story is really to highlight the centurion's faith. When you read through the stories of Jesus, people are often amazed at what Jesus says or does, but rarely do you ever see Jesus amazed by something someone else does. And yet, we read in verse 9 that the faith of the centurion amazes Him:

**Luke 7:9** - 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."

If we call ourselves people of faith, followers of Jesus, then we would be wise to pay attention to this passage, that we might understand what it is about the centurion's faith that amazes Jesus, so that we also might have great faith. What makes the centurion's faith great, and how do we get this kind of faith?

I see two aspects to the centurion's great faith:

### **1) Humility**

**Luke 7:3-7** - The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. <sup>4</sup> When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, <sup>5</sup> because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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 story centers around a centurion who has a servant who is sick. Roman centurions were military leaders in charge of 100 soldiers (decurions were over 10, and chiliarchs over 1000 soldiers). Even though he is a Gentile and not a Jew, he is evidently a friend of the Jews, even building a synagogue for them. **But notice the stark contrast between the elders of the Jews and the centurion when it comes to their approach to Jesus.** The elders ask Jesus to heal his servant on the basis of the centurion’s goodness; in their opinion, he DESERVES to have Jesus heal his servant, because he loves their nation and has built their synagogue. But the centurion takes a completely different approach: “I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.”

And Jesus is amazed at the centurion’s faith. One of the reasons, I believe, is his humility, his recognition of his own unworthiness before Jesus, that the healing of his servant is not something he has earned or deserves because of his love for the nation or the synagogue he has built.

Humility is consistently rewarded by Jesus:

**Luke 18:9–14** - To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and **give a tenth of all I get.**’ <sup>13</sup> “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ <sup>14</sup> “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

**Luke 14:7–11** - When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: <sup>8</sup>“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. <sup>9</sup>If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the **least important place**. <sup>10</sup>But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. <sup>11</sup>For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Those who are humble will be exalted by God. And in the Beatitudes, Jesus calls blessed those who are poor in spirit, those who are spiritually bankrupt and have nothing to boast about before God, those who mourn for their sin and how it has impacted themselves and others.

**Matthew 5:3-4** - “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Those who are humble, who are poor in spirit, are blessed, theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and they will be comforted.

By way of contrast, **pride is consistently seen as a dangerous thing.**

**Proverbs 16:18-19** - Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. <sup>19</sup>Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.

This kind of pride includes a foolish self-reliance that comes when we begin to think we don’t need anyone else, including God, in order to live our lives.

**Proverbs 28:26** - Those who trust in themselves are fools, but those who walk in wisdom are kept safe.

A number of years ago, I wrote a Pulse article where I thanked all of the people who had helped get me to where I am today, and there were at least 50 people. The fact is that none of you got to where they are on their own; it took parents, relatives, teachers, friends, professionals, and many others to get us to where we are. **No one is self-reliant.** No one is a self-made man or woman.

**Proverbs 26:12** - Do you see a person wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for them.

Or, as Paul put it in **Galatians 6:3** –If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.

There is a reason that recovery movements begin with admitting our need for help, admitting that we can not overcome our addiction on our own. But in order to do that, it takes laying down our pride and admitting that trying to be self-reliant is a foolish way to live.

As foolish as it is to try to be self-reliant and not accept the help from those around us, there is an even greater foolishness, **and that is to refuse to accept God's help**, to think that we can live life without God. After all, pride is what keeps people from accepting God's offer of salvation, because salvation is for those who know they are sinners and know that they are not good enough to save themselves.

**Romans 3:20** - Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

As Martin Lloyd-Jones put it, when talking about discipleship:

“There is the mountain that you have to scale, the heights you have to climb; and the first thing you must realize, as you look at that mountain which you are told you must ascend, is that you cannot do it, that you are utterly incapable in and of yourself, and that any attempt to do it in your own strength is proof positive that you have not understood it.”

None of you got to where you are without the help of others. And no one is where they are without the help of God, whether or not you acknowledge Him. The skills you have, the opportunities you were given, all of it is from God. I love how Tim Keller defined pride: **pride is cosmic plagiarism**. Plagiarism is when someone else wrote or created it, but I claim that I did it, and that therefore I deserve the glory and honor. You would naturally be outraged if I plagiarized from you or someone else and did not give the credit where it was due. But we are all guilty of that kind of pride. There is nothing good that we have done or accomplished that we do not ultimately owe to the grace and power of God.

**1 Corinthians 4:7** - For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

**What do you have that you did not receive?** And why do you boast as though you did not receive it? The humble person is wise because, by admitting their need for help, they open themselves up to God's spiritual power. Self-reliance leads to destruction. Humility leads to salvation and to spiritual power.

**How counter-cultural is this?** Our world emphasizes self-reliance, self-confidence, self-expression. Believe in yourself. Express yourself. You can do this on your own. Poverty of spirit is the admission that we don't "got this." It's a recognition that we are sinners, that we have blind spots, that we are always in need of God's mercy and grace. It's an admission that self-reliance is a joke. **It's the realization that we can not even take our next breath apart from the power and grace of God.** Again, this is not low self-esteem as our world thinks of it, wallowing in our own worthlessness. No - it is a proper appraisal of our condition before a holy God. **As Dan Phillips wrote in his commentary on Proverbs:** "It is not the case of a 6-foot tall man trying to convince himself he's only 2 feet tall, but standing next to a giant redwood and seeing himself dwarfed by it." When we come to know our great God, we see how small we are. When we see the holiness of God, we realize how sinful we are. When we see the eternally good perspective of God, we realize how limited and warped our view of reality is. We will not trust in ourselves, or think too highly of ourselves.

As Paul said in **2 Corinthians 12:9–10** - But he said to me, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

And as Andrew Murray says, "Just as water ever seeks and fills the lowest place, so the moment God finds you abased and empty, His glory and power flow in."

A key part of having great faith is having humility – a right appraisal of ourselves before our great God, before Jesus.

## **2) Trust in Jesus' power and authority**

**Luke 7:6-8** - Jesus 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. <sup>7</sup> That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup> 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.”

Even though the centurion does not think he is worthy to even meet with Jesus, he does not let his unworthiness keep him from believing that Jesus has the authority to heal. That is so important. His humility is not the kind that leads him to say “I shouldn’t even bother asking.” Instead, his trust and confidence are not in whether or not he is worthy, but in who Jesus is and what He is capable of doing.

**He gives a military analogy to make his point.** By his analogy, he shows that there is something militaristic about Jesus – just as the centurion serves under the authority of the Caesar and has soldiers under him who obey his command, Jesus carries the authority of God, and disease and even death is under his command. He even believes that Jesus has the power to heal even without having to go to his house.

And Jesus is amazed at the centurion’s faith. He sees in this man the right blend of humility – “I do not deserve to have you come under my roof” and trust – “But say the word, and my servant will be healed.” We might say that great faith is a blend of humility before God and trust in Jesus’ power and authority. He takes Jesus at His word, believing that what he says is true.

**Hebrews 11:1-2** - Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

The centurion has faith that despite his own unworthiness, despite the fact that he does not deserve anything good, Jesus is still able to heal with just a word.

It is often helpful to think of concepts like this on a continuum. On one end of the extreme would be **arrogance or entitlement** – I deserve to have you heal my servant. This is the approach of the religious elders in this passage, believing that his good works earn him God’s favor and put Jesus in the man’s debt. But on the opposite end of the extreme would be **disobedience or unbelief** – I don’t deserve to have you under my roof, so I won’t ask, or I’m so bad, I can’t believe that what you said applies to me. It’s seeing the enormity of the task and our weakness and

refusing to go, or being so overwhelmed by our unworthiness that we disqualify ourselves.

**The middle ground would be humble faith.** I am unworthy for the favor or the task. But I believe that despite my unworthiness, you are a God of grace and power, and you can do whatever you please. If you have promised, then I believe you will fulfill, even if I am not worthy. And if you have called me to obedience, then you will supply what I need and work through me to accomplish the task.

**Philippians 2:12–13** - Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,<sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

When I am preparing a sermon, there inevitably comes a time when I am overwhelmed by the insurmountable gap between what God deserves and what I have to offer, between who God requires me to be and who I actually am. I find myself on the ground, in tears or on the verge of tears, with my body gripped by some sort of unnamable agony. I beg God to forgive me, and I plead with Him to do through me what I am incapable of doing in my own strength, and to receive the honor that He deserves. But if I stayed on the ground, paralyzed by own inadequacy, I would be disobedient. I must rise and move forward in obedience to Him, trusting that His Holy Spirit can bridge the gap.

Do not focus on your own unworthiness, your own inadequacy in a way that leads to a lack of faith or to disobedience. Yes, humility is the right posture before God, but instead of getting stuck on your own unworthiness, great faith ends with a focus on His grace and a trust in His power.

**Ephesians 1:18–20** - I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,<sup>19</sup> and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength<sup>20</sup> he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

And so, despite our frailty, we can say with Jesus:

**Matthew 19:26** – Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

In the end, the good news is that it is not really about the amount of faith, but the object of our faith. It does not matter how strongly you believe something if you are believing in the wrong thing. **Consider two people walking on the edge of a cliff who start to fall off as the ground gives way.** Below them are two ledges. One person steps with confidence onto the ledge on the right, proclaiming that he is sure it will hold him. And yet when he steps on it, the ledge breaks and he plummets to the ocean below. The second person steps with real doubt and uncertainty onto the ledge on his left, unsure that it will hold him. And yet, when he steps on it, the ledge holds him securely. In the end, what saved the second man? It wasn't how strong his faith was; it was the object of his faith.

**Matthew 17:19–20** - Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn't we drive it out?”<sup>20</sup> He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

And so, if we want to have great faith like the centurion, we must humbly put our faith in the only one who can save, Jesus. **There are some who might believe that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere in your belief.** But the first person, bobbing in the ocean, would like to have a word with you. There is only one who can save.

**Acts 4:12** – “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

## **How do we get this faith?**

### **1) Repent and trust in Jesus**

Turn from sin, self-centeredness, and from trusting in your own righteousness the way the religious elders did in this passage. Get your eyes off of yourself and how worthy or unworthy you think you are. And put your faith in Jesus, who died for your sins and offers you eternal life, His Holy Spirit.

**Luke 5:31–32** - Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.<sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

**Luke 24:46–47** - He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day,<sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

**Acts 2:37–38** - When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

**Acts 3:19–20** - Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,<sup>20</sup> and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.

It takes humility to admit that you are completely dependent upon God for every breath you breathe, and that apart from His grace and power, you can do nothing. And it takes humility to admit your sin, to repent, and to trust in Jesus. But he is the one who saves. And like the centurion, this kind of faith often comes about when things go wrong. The suffering or failures of life often humble us into realizing that we are not in control, that we are in need, and we turn to God.

**CS Lewis, in his book *The Problem of Pain***, famously said, “God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

Repent and believe the gospel. Put your trust in Jesus.

## **2) Ask God to help you see the depth of your sin.**

**Psalm 139:23–24** - Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.<sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Don’t be afraid to see yourself for who you truly are, to be honest about your flaws and faults.

## **3) Take God at His Word**

And take God at His Word, believing that what He says is true.

**2 Timothy 2:13** - If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

Do not get stuck on your own unworthiness but see His amazing grace as displayed on the cross in Jesus, and trust in His power and authority.

Great faith is a combination of humility and a resolute trust in Jesus' power and authority.