

April 14, 2024

“Faith of a Centurion”  
Lesson 2

Luke 7:1-10

**Intro**

Capernaum was a town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee about 75-80 miles north of Jerusalem. It is mentioned 16 times in the New Testament, as it was Jesus’ base of operations for His earthly ministry. Five of the disciples were called from Capernaum: James, John, Peter, Andrew—all fishermen—and Matthew, the tax collector. Though it was a relatively small town of a few hundred people, it was significant for several reasons. First, the fishing industry provided steady work from the abundant fish in the lake. The surplus fish were salted and sent to larger cities like Jerusalem. Second, it was located on the main road from Damascus. This made it a good place for the Romans to set up spots for collecting toll taxes on goods going thru the area. According to Luke 5:27, this is what Matthew did. There were also Jewish tax collectors here to collect the annual temple tax from the Jews in Galilee. Finally, with all the tax monies being collected, the Romans kept soldiers there to protect that revenue. Today’s lesson deals with one of these Roman soldiers and his encounter with Jesus that showed faith.

**Read Luke 7:1-10**

1. vs. 1: Just prior to this verse, Jesus has been teaching and healing  
He is now finished, and moves from “a level place” (6:17) into the city
  
2. vs. 2: One of the Roman centurions is mentioned, having a sick servant  
He was the leader of a group of 80 men, part of a larger group of 5000  
His servant was likely an enslaved person rather than someone he has hired  
The losing side of Roman battles usually were taken into bondage  
The children born to enslaved women also became slaves as well  
However, ancient sources indicate that many slaves were freed by age 30  
We see the term “freedman” in Acts 6:9  
This particular slave was “valued highly” by his master  
The word Luke uses here indicates *respect*, not just usefulness
  
3. vs. 3: This verse tells us two things about the centurion  
First, he “heard of Jesus”—he is aware of Jesus in two likely meanings  
Living in Capernaum, he has heard of Jesus’ teachings and miracles  
He has likely heard the news that Jesus has come back into the city  
This is a small community of only 300 or so people  
Second, this man seems intelligent based on his actions  
He knows he is a Gentile and Jesus is a Jew  
He seems to be aware of the issues surrounding Jews interacting with Gentiles  
He therefore sends Jewish elders to Jesus with the request to heal his servant  
He has a good relationship with these elders, as we’ll see in vs. 4-5

4. vs. 4-5: The elders who come to Jesus here appear to be leaders in the synagogue in Capernaum  
They don't come as if ordered to; they come willingly, pleading for the centurion  
There is no background info as to why, but the centurion *loves* the Jewish people  
He has built their synagogue as a sign of that love  
He appears to be "one that feared God", a devout people of no religious connection  
The building of the synagogue seems done out of respect for Judaism and God
5. vs. 6a: Capernaum is not a large town, with less than 300 people in it  
It's estimated that no more than 15 minutes would get you from one side to the other  
This verse says the centurion sent friends to Jesus after the Jewish elders  
There couldn't have been much time between the sending of the two groups  
The verse says Jesus "was not far from the house"  
Perhaps the centurion saw him approaching and sent the friend group  
The message they bring, which is surprising, is considered in the next section
6. vs. 6b-7: The message has the centurion calling Jesus "Lord"  
This is the same as someone today calling another "Sir"  
It is a mark of respect, but not a confirmation of Jesus' divine nature  
The centurion also tells Jesus not to come to his house; he is unworthy  
This shows the humility of the centurion  
It may also show the centurion's sensitivity to Jewish cultural customs  
It likely would cause problems for a Jew and Gentile to meet  
This is especially so as the home for this meeting was a Gentile's
7. vs. 8: Here the centurion explains his reasoning for the message in vs. 6-7  
He knows the extent to his authority  
People under him in the military hierarchy do what he says  
He knows they will  
The implication is that the centurion also knows the extent of Jesus' authority  
He commanded a demon to come out of a man in Luke 4  
The centurion likely has heard of this miracle  
He implies that Jesus has more authority over more things than he does  
This would include Jesus' authority of any kind of illness
8. vs. 9: Jesus' response to the centurion's message is remarkable  
"He was *amazed*"  
People are amazed at the miracles that Jesus does  
Only twice does the NT record that Jesus Himself was amazed  
Once is in this passage, as well as the parallel passage in Matt. 8:10  
The other is the lack of faith of the people of Nazareth in Mark 6:6  
Jesus does not actively seek to minister to Gentiles, but rather to fellow Jews  
Yet here a Gentile demonstrates the faith that Jesus calls all Jews to demonstrate

9. vs. 10: We read in this verse that the centurion's friends return to the house, and the servant is healed  
Jesus never touched, much less even saw, this ailing servant  
He healed him from a distance  
    Jesus has done this two other times  
        The Gentile woman's daughter in Matt. 15:21-28  
        The nobleman and his son in John 4:46-54  
Jesus heals by touch, by command, and by prayer  
Here He heals from a distance because of the faith demonstrated by a Gentile

Application: The issue this story bring up for us is how much we believe in Jesus' authority. Our text refers to this belief as "Centurion Faith". Our prayers for the healing of others, or even ourselves, must be filled with the confidence that Jesus can do what we are praying for. James 1:6-8 talks about this: "But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." Our faith is shown by our actions, which is also true of the centurion. He cultivated friendships and treated others with respect and honor. When his household was in need, his character and actions were remembered. May that be true of us as well.

Prayer: Father God, we are all broken people in need of Your healing. May we honor You in all ways. Forgive us our doubts, and help us to develop greater faith that You always do exactly what you say you will. Help us to have the sure faith shown by the centurion. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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