



CAPITOL COMMISSION

A Man of Amazing Faith (Luke 7:1-10)

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The placement of the next recorded incident shows the unfolding nature of this gospel account. Luke's narrative of the centurion provides us with a visible picture of an individual whose life exemplified the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Plain. This man is whom the gospel points to as the representative of what it means to be a citizen on the new covenant, a man with a faith that even amazed Jesus. In reflecting back on what he taught in his sermon, we will see with clarity how the life of this centurion was the living depiction of his message. We will also see the utter joy and enthusiasm with which Jesus responds to the one who humbly lives on the basis of his words.

In considering the content just taught in Luke 6:20-49, we find the following main themes in Jesus' sermon. The granting of kingdom blessings to those who in their brokenness and poverty cling to Jesus. They have rejected the influence of blind guides and have set him as their teacher. They are those who love their enemies and give with no thought of return. They display the mercy of their Father and do not respond in a judgmental attitude toward others because they see their sin and seek to address it. Their lives produce good fruit because they possess a good heart. They not only call Jesus Lord, but live their lives in obedience to his teachings.

Who is it that exemplified these kingdom characteristics? The individual this account identifies was not a Jew but a foreigner, an outsider in every sense of the word. However, he is the one who amazes Jesus with his faith. He was not part of the covenant community but a commander in the Roman army. He was a gentile, an enemy of Israel, one who did not possess the benefits of heritage or the blessings of prior biblical instruction. However, in some manner, the message of Jesus had touched this man's heart and transformed his actions in such a demonstrable way that he became the pattern of faith which Jesus highlights and Luke chronicles in his Gospel. For us to have a faith that amazes Jesus, we must be willing to hear and believe his message and by faith respond in obedience regardless of the situations and circumstances we may find surrounding our lives..

Luke 7:1-10 - (1) After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. (2) Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. (3) When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. (4) And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, (5) for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue." (6) And Jesus went with them. 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. (7) Therefore I did not presume to come to you.

But say the word, and let my servant be healed. (8) For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." (9) When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." (10) And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

THE MAN WHO AMAZED JESUS

After he finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum – Luke establishes both a chronological and contextual setting in this statement. While this account takes place historically after the teaching of the Sermon of the Plain, he also highlights the completion of Jesus' sayings in their entirety when he meets the delegation of elders seeking his miraculous help for their benefactor. So in view of Jesus' teaching, Luke's audience encounters the man who amazed Jesus, the man's whose faith is unparalleled in the entirety of God's chosen nation. For those who were looking for a living, breathing example of what Jesus sought in his new covenant community, Jesus declares to all a man whom he deems as having amazing faith. This man was not perfect, but was one who epitomized the qualities of coming to Jesus in humility and one whose life revealed the fruits of a heart touched by the Lord

Now a centurion – A centurion was the most important officer from a military standpoint. Each had full responsibility over his soldiers, from command in battle, to administration, training, and discipline. The office of centurion was normally the highest one within reach of the ordinary soldier and those achieving this position often rose through the ranks because of their experience and knowledge.¹ In this instance, the centurion was not serving in a direct Roman military capacity because Roman soldiers were stationed in Capernaum. (Apparently no Roman forces resided in Galilee until A.D. 44.) As a result, he may have been in the service of Herod Antipas, who used non-Jewish soldiers as commanders in the military.² From the world's perspective, there is nothing that would cause one to think this centurion could be elevated to the heights of faith as seen by Jesus. He should be a corrupted man, hated for being a gentile, a military leader under Herod's charge for the purpose of collecting taxes from the people. However the power of Christ to transform is greater than any environment that may be encountered. For the broken who seek him in humility he not only welcomes them into his kingdom, but also produces the works of Christ in their lives that speak of their divine citizenship regardless of their situation.

Pennsylvania

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A servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued – The first thing that should amaze us about this man is the fact that a servant would be highly valued. A servant during this time was a tool utilized to accomplish a task. If a tool gets broken or in the case of this individual, is about to die, one simply replaces the broken tool with another. There is no emotional connection or affection that would elevate the value of a slave about the task to be accomplished. The fact that this man valued his slave enough to inconvenience himself to seek out Jesus through Jewish intermediaries shows a love unknown in the near-eastern culture. It is a love that demonstrated the touch of Jesus in the centurion's heart, a love that could never be paid back in kind. It was an amazing love; for this servant was even lower than an enemy, he was of no value, worthless in the eyes of the world. However to those of Christ, he was one highly valued, one whom Jesus commands must be loved.

He is worthy...I am not worthy – Here are two contrasting perspectives about the same individual. The Jewish elders of the synagogue came with a glowing endorsement of this centurion's worth and value. They declare this man worthy in spite of his baggage because of his love for the nation and generosity in building their synagogue. The tenor of this plea also gives us a glimpse as to their framework of religious thought. In coming to Jesus to seek his intervention, they revealed an expectation of blessing on the basis of one's worth. This, in a nutshell, is what Judaism had become, favor from God on the basis of one's performance. This is miles away from what Jesus taught, and the current nature of the centurion's heart. This man comes to Jesus, not with expectations, but a humility that originates from an understanding of his own sin and his position as an outsider of the covenant community. The healing of his beloved servant was not on the basis of his worth or performance, but on the basis of the mercy of Jesus as to whether this lavish blessing would be bestowed on his servant.

THE FAITH THAT AMAZED JESUS

For I too am a man under authority – In this statement the centurion is acknowledging the authority Jesus possessed. This analogous remark equates the authority in his limited sphere of influence with that of Jesus. It allows him to grasp the authority of the one who has demonstrated power to do the miraculous. If he is able to order the soldiers under his command to perform certain actions on the basis of the authority granted to him, what of the man who has the power to do the supernatural; to accomplish what cannot be done by natural means? This man had amazing faith because he understood that Jesus' ability to do the miraculous spoke to the ultimate authority granted to Jesus by God. It is a faith that understands Jesus is not

bound to the natural order; he has the authority of God because he is God in flesh. For us to possess a faith that will stop Jesus in his tracks, we must place our complete confidence in him to accomplish all God's purposes in this broken and fallen world.

But say the word – In a previous account, Luke describes the crowds as swarming Jesus to touch him in order to be healed. Yet this man understood that the power to heal his servant was not a mystical experience that required physical touch, but it was at the command of Jesus, it was on the authority of his word. The Scriptures declare in Psalm 33:6, "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made." Jesus marveled at this man's faith because he believed in the creative and restorative power of the word of the Lord. In this statement, the centurion acknowledged that God's power was at work through the words that Jesus would speak. This power in the words of the Lord remains the same today, whether spoken or written it communicates God's unchanging promise for all who believe them. A faith that amazes Jesus trusts in the word of God; it defines our reality and compels us to live on the basis of its truth.

APPLICATION

In the most unlikely of places, Jesus finds a man whose faith astounded him. In announcing that he had not found such faith in Israel, he reveals a desire to find those who possessed a remarkable faith. This was not a small or insignificant matter to the Lord, but bore such importance that he stops and announces this fact to the crowd following him. This is the man identified by the son of God as the example of one possessing great faith. This should bring us comfort and encouragement on several levels. First, what stopped Jesus in his tracks was the man's faith. It was not his education, experience, heritage, or accomplishment that amazed Jesus. It was the fact that this man sought him in humility and believed the authority of his word to accomplish what could only be done by God. Next, this man existed in a dark and corrupt environment in which the religious establishment believed that nothing good could be produced. However, when Christ touches the heart, God redeems not only the individual but also the environment this individual touches in order that the glory and greatness of his name may be proclaimed and advanced.

1 - Robert H. Stein, Luke, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992). 218.

2- Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988). 421.