

**Luke 7:1-10**  
**February 17, 2019**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: What does “great faith” look like? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** Luke now provides a record of Jesus’s ministry in Capernaum, which begins with two miracles. Luke starts with a story about a Roman centurion who sought Jesus to heal his servant. As we go through this story, let’s see what “great faith” looks like from Jesus’s vantage point.

**BOOK (NIV 1984):**

V.1:

- When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum (He left Nazareth to go to Capernaum per Matthew’s account).

V.2:

- There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.

V.3:

- The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.

V.4:

- When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this,

V.5:

- because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.”

V.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.

V.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.

V.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.”

V.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.”

V.10:

- Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: How about a trivia question. How did Jews typically view the Romans? [The Jewish elders had little love for the Romans in general and Roman soldiers in particular]

Q: And how were slaves or servants typically viewed by their centurions? [In the society of that day, a slave was nothing, only a tool or a thing to be used as the owner wished. He had no rights whatsoever, not even the right to live. An owner could mistreat and kill a slave without having to give an account. But this soldier loved his slave.]

Q V.1-2: The centurion had a servant who was sick and about to die. How did the centurion view his servant? [He was “highly valued”]

Q V.3: The centurion had heard of Jesus. Who did he send to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant? [elders of the Jews]

Q V.4: The elders of the Jews could have had a bad attitude toward this centurion, but they didn't. In fact, how did they describe the centurion to Jesus? [“This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.”]

Q: What strikes you about how they implored Jesus to go to the centurion to heal his servant? [The Jews did not understand “grace, so they thought Christ would grant the request of this man, because he was worthy.]

Q: Do you ever find yourself thinking along these same lines? [Yes, we all can lapse into a merit system. But it is God's abundant, unlimited grace that is central to who He is. He is not necessarily “won over” by the idea that someone “deserves” to be healed.]

Q V.5: What did the elders of the Jews mean by “nation?” [It refers to the Jewish people, not a Jewish political entity since at the time of Jesus and Luke no independent Jewish nation existed.]

**Observation:** The centurion was credited with building a synagogue for the Jews. It would be considered unusual for a Roman centurion to even have a care or concern for Jews, but he did. He “loved” the Jewish community.

Q V.6-8: When the centurion learned that Jesus was headed his way to heal his servant, what did the centurion do next? [He sent friends to say to him: “Lord, don't trouble yourself, for 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. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 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.”]

Q: Wait. In verse 3 the centurion sent elders of the Jews to seek out Jesus to ask him to come heal his servant. That seems contradictory, but is it? How can we reconcile these two verses? [Let people engage]

Q: How would you describe the centurion's message that he asked his friends to send to Jesus? [Let people engage. First, he addresses Jesus as “Lord,” which says he recognizes Jesus's

supreme authority over him. Second, he exuded humility when he said, “I am not worthy to come to you or for you to be under my roof.]

Q V.7-8: Though the centurion didn’t believe he was worthy enough to approach Jesus, what did the centurion believe about Jesus? [“Say the word, and my servant will be healed. Then he supports his thinking as a centurion who gives orders to his own men. When he gives a command, they do it.]

Q V.9: How did Jesus respond to the centurion’s explanation for lack of worthiness and the ability to give commands that would be fulfilled? [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.”]

Q: Did you notice Jesus stating that he hasn’t found such great faith “even in Israel?” What is He really saying? [A Gentile centurion was showing great faith that surpassed what Jesus would expect to see from the Jewish community!]

Q V.10: Did the centurion ever meet Jesus? [No! We see that the centurion’s friends turned around and headed back to the centurion’s home and discovered that the servant was healed!]

**X-REF Matt 15:21-28:** Let’s read another account in which Jesus uses the phrase “great faith.”

Q: I opened this section of Scripture inviting us to see what “great faith” looks like. After reading this story, how does Jesus describe “great faith” [Let people engage]

**LOOK:**

If this Roman, with very little spiritual instruction, had that kind of faith in God’s Word, how much greater *our* faith ought to be! We have an entire Bible to read and study, as well as nearly 2,000 years of church history to encourage us, and yet we are guilty of “no faith” (Mark 4:40) or “little faith” (Matt. 14:31). Our prayer ought to be, “Lord, increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5)

**Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 195). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

### **The Servant: His Response to Faith (Luke 7:1–10)**

In the Gospels and the Book of Acts, Roman centurions are presented as quality men of character, and this one is a sterling example. The Jewish elders had little love for the Romans in general and Roman soldiers in particular, and yet the elders commended this officer to Jesus. He loved the Jewish people in Capernaum and even built them a synagogue. He loved his servant and did not want him to die. This centurion was not a Stoic who insulated himself from the pain of others. He had a heart of concern, even for his lowly servant boy who was dying from a paralyzing disease (Matt. 8:6).

Matthew's condensed report (Matt. 8:5–13) does not contradict Luke's fuller account. The centurion's friends represented him to Jesus and then represented Jesus to him. When a newscaster reports that the President or the Prime Minister said something to Congress or Parliament, this does not necessarily mean that the message was delivered by them in person. It was probably delivered by one of their official representatives, but the message would be received as from the President or Prime Minister personally.

We are impressed not only with this man's great love, but also his great humility. Imagine a Roman officer telling a poor Jewish rabbi that he was unworthy to have Him enter his house! The Romans were not known for displaying humility, especially before their Jewish subjects.

But the characteristic that most impressed Jesus was the man's faith. Twice in the Gospel record we are told that Jesus marveled. Here in Capernaum, He marveled at the faith of a Gentile; and in Nazareth, He marveled at the unbelief of the Jews (Mark 6:6). The only other person Jesus commended for having "great faith" was a Gentile woman whose daughter He delivered from a demon (Matt. 15:28). It is worth noting that in both of these instances, Jesus healed *at a distance* (see Ps. 107:20; Eph. 2:11–13).

The centurion's faith certainly was remarkable. After all, he was a Gentile whose background was pagan. He was a Roman soldier, trained to be self-sufficient, and we have no evidence that he had ever heard Jesus preach. Perhaps he heard about Jesus' healing power from the nobleman whose son Jesus had healed, also at a distance (John 4:46–54). His soldiers may also have brought him reports of the miracles Jesus had performed, for the Romans kept close touch with the events in Jewish life.

The important word in Luke 7:8 is "also." (It should be in Matt. 8:9 as well, but the KJV omits it for some reason. The NASB has "too" in both places.) The officer saw a parallel between the way he commanded his soldiers and the way Jesus commanded diseases. Both the centurion and Jesus were under authority, and because they were under authority, they had the right to exercise authority. *All they had to do was say the word and things happened.* What tremendous faith this man exhibited! No wonder Jesus marveled.

If this Roman, with very little spiritual instruction, had that kind of faith in God's Word, how much greater *our* faith ought to be! We have an entire Bible to read and study, as well as nearly 2,000 years of church history to encourage us, and yet we are guilty of "no faith" (Mark 4:40) or "little faith" (Matt. 14:31). Our prayer ought to be, "Lord, increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5)

**Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 222)**

*D. Jesus' ministry in Capernaum and surrounding cities (chaps. 7–8)*

In this section is an interchange between the ministry of Jesus in miraculous signs (which again authenticated that He is the Messiah: 7:1–17, 36–50; 8:22–56) and His teaching (which has authority based on the message He was proclaiming: 7:18–35; 8:1–21). Luke emphasized His teaching, which has authority because of the symbolic miraculous events which show that Jesus is the Messiah.

1. JESUS'S MINISTRY IN THE MIDST OF SICKNESS AND DEATH (7:1–17)

Here Luke recorded two miracles—a centurion's servant healed, and a dead boy raised—as a basis for belief in authority (vv. 22–23).

*a. Healing a centurion's servant (7:1–10) (Matt. 8:5–13; John 4:43–54).*

7:1–10. After Jesus' sermon (chap. 6), which was given outside of town, **He entered Capernaum**, His adopted hometown where He performed many of His messianic signs. A **centurion** in the Roman army was a commander of a century, a group of 100 soldiers. This centurion in Capernaum, unlike most Roman soldiers, was well liked and respected by the Jewish people in and around Capernaum because he loved them and **built them a synagogue** (7:4–5). This **centurion's servant ... was extremely sick and about to die** (v. 2). **The centurion** had faith that **Jesus** would **heal** the servant. Perhaps the reason he sent Jewish **elders** to present his request was that he doubted that Jesus would have heeded a Roman soldier's request. Matthew 8:5–13 records the same event, but Matthew did not record the sending of messengers. He presented the account as if the centurion were present himself. Matthew was reflecting what the centurion meant when he noted that his messengers do his bidding as if he were there himself (Luke 7:8).

The centurion realized that his request was brash and that he really was not **worthy to** see Jesus (v. 7). Jesus **was amazed** (*ethaumasen*; cf. comments on 2:18) at the centurion and said, **I have not found such great faith even in Israel**. The concept of faith is extremely important throughout chapters 7 and 8. It is vital to believe who Jesus is (i.e., the Messiah) and what He said. The exercise of faith by Gentiles also becomes prominent later in Luke's book.

**Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 216–221). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

**4. Who is This Jesus? (7:1–50)**

After dealing with Jesus' teaching of his disciples in the Sermon on the Plain (6:12–49), Luke recorded a series of incidents that reveal that Jesus is indeed the Promised One John the Baptist announced. This is shown by Jesus' healing (7:1–10) and raising the dead (7:11–17) and the following interpretation of these events given to John the Baptist (7:18–23). The fact that this healing and raising of the dead was performed among the outcasts of society (a Gentile who was a member of the army of occupation [7:1–10], a helpless widow [7:11–17], and later a woman who was a sinner [7:36–50]) further explains who Jesus is (7:19–20). Luke prepared the reader for this ministry to the outcasts of society by Jesus' programmatic sermon given in 4:16–30. Already

associated in the tradition with 7:18–23 was Jesus’ testimony to John the Baptist and a prediction of his rejection (7:24–35; cf. Matt 11:7–19). Thus its placement at this point by Luke (and Matthew) is due to the fact that these two accounts were already connected. For Luke, Jesus’ prediction of his rejection in 7:24–35 also clarifies who he is. It does this by describing John the Baptist’s role and how he served as the Messiah’s precursor in preparing the people for God’s kingdom (7:27–28) and by showing that the Son of Man will be rejected (7:34). The section reaches its culmination in Jesus’ forgiving a woman of her sins (7:36–50), which looks back to 7:22–23. The section concludes with the question, “Who is this who even forgives sin?” (7:49).

In this section Luke is telling Theophilus that Jesus is indeed “the one who was to come” (7:19), the one with authority to raise the dead (7:14–15) and even with the divine authority to forgive sins (7:49; cf. 5:21). Who is this one? Luke and the reader know. He is “the Son of the Most High” (1:32), “the Son of God” (1:35; 3:22), the “Lord” (1:43; 2:11; 3:4), the “Christ” (2:11, 26; 4:18, 41), and the “Savior” (2:11).

## Context

The story of the healing of the centurion’s servant is also found in Matt 8:5–13, and we find a similar account in John 4:46–53. The main differences in the Matthean and Lukan accounts are due to Matthew’s abbreviation of the incident. Again, we find the classification of the account difficult. What is clear is the stress on Jesus’ commendation of the centurion’s faith (7:9).

## Comments

**7:1 When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people.** This serves as a transition from the Sermon on the Plain to the present account (cf. Matt 7:28a).

**He entered Capernaum.** Capernaum already has been mentioned in Luke 4:23, and this incident may have been one of those referred to in 4:23 but, because of Luke’s “orderly” arrangement of material, comes at this point. See comments on 4:23.

**7:2 There a centurion’s servant.** A centurion in the Roman army was an officer in charge of one hundred men. Six centurions and their men served under a tribune. In this instance the centurion was not serving in a direct Roman military capacity because Roman soldiers were not 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. It is clear from 7:5–6, 9 that this centurion was a Gentile. The term for “servant” here is *doulos*. In 7:7 *pais* is used. They are essentially synonymous in this account.

**Whom his master valued highly.** Luke probably added this to heighten the centurion’s concern for his servant.

**Was sick and about to die.** Matthew 8:6 describes the servant as “paralyzed and in terrible suffering.”

**7:3 The centurion heard of Jesus.** Even as the centurion had heard of Jesus, so Theophilus also had heard (Luke 1:4); and just as the centurion learned certainty and truth from what he heard, Luke hoped that Theophilus would also recognize the certainty and truth of what he had heard and now was reading.

**Sent some elders of the Jews.** The term “elder” refers not to the age of those sent (as in 15:25; Acts 2:17) but to their being Jewish officials (as in Luke 9:22; 20:1; 22:52; Acts 4:5, 8, 23). Here they refer to leaders of the local Jewish community, not to members of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin. The use of the expression “of the Jews” suggests that the author of this Gospel and its readers were

Gentiles. In the abbreviated Matthean account the centurion is portrayed as approaching Jesus and talking to him directly.

**Asking him to come and heal his servant.** Luke also believed that the “asking” of Luke 7:3 and the “saying” of 7:6–8 came from the centurion, for these participles are both in the singular and have as their antecedent the centurion and not the elders. In other words, if asked, “Who spoke to Jesus?” Luke would answer as Matthew would, “The centurion did.”

**7:4 The man deserves to have you do this.** The term “deserves” should not be interpreted to mean *earned* or *merited*, as the replies of the centurion in 7:6 (“I do not deserve to have you come under my roof”) and 7:7 (“I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you”) reveal. That Jesus commented on the centurion’s faith rather than his good works indicates that “deserves” is not understood meritoriously. In essence this expression means something like, *He is a kind man who has been good to our people*. The centurion may have been a “god-fearer,” i.e., a Gentile who believed in the teachings of Judaism and kept the moral law but who had not become a Jewish proselyte (cf. Acts 10:2, 22; 13:16, 26).

**7:5 Because he loves our nation.** “Nation” here refers to the Jewish people, not a Jewish political entity since at the time of Jesus and Luke no independent Jewish nation existed.

**And has built our synagogue.** This probably was the synagogue mentioned in Luke 4:33. The giving of contributions by Gentiles to support Jewish synagogues is well attested. The building of a synagogue by a Gentile would have been quite unusual, although we do possess an inscription that tells of a Gentile building a Jewish place of prayer. It has been suggested that what was meant was that the centurion was a large (or the largest) contributor for the building of the synagogue.

**7:6 So Jesus went with them.** Compare Acts 10:20, 23 for a parallel in which Peter proceeded to the house of the Gentile, Cornelius.

**When the centurion sent friends to say to him.** “To say” or “saying” (RSV) is again a singular participle indicating that Luke envisioned the following conversation as taking place between Jesus and the centurion.

**Lord.** The Aramaic equivalent of “Lord” (*Mar*) was a title of respect in the setting of Jesus, but the title took on greater meaning after the resurrection. See the comments on 6:46.

**Don’t trouble yourself.** Compare Luke 8:49.

**I do not deserve.** This could involve either a sense of “unworthiness” or “uncleanness.”

**Under my roof.** For a Jew to enter a Gentile’s home would defile him ceremonially. The centurion knew this and did not want to subject Jesus to ritual impurity (cf. Acts 10:28; 11:2, 12). This passage is a good example of the social and religious gap that existed between Jew and Greek in the first century and with which the early church struggled.

**7:7 That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.** This favors the view that “unworthiness” rather than “uncleanness” is the greater issue (cf. 3:16; 5:8). No reason is given for this sense of unworthiness. To claim that this feeling of unworthiness was due to a sense of depravity, a sense of immorality, being a Gentile, a recognition of the contrast between himself and Jesus, or a sense of defilement is purely speculative. Whereas both Luke and Matthew emphasized the faith of the centurion, Luke emphasized his humility as well.

**But say the word.** True faith realizes that God can heal apart from rituals, special ointments, touch, or monetary gifts to the healer. The centurion recognized that all Jesus needed to say was a single word. His faith in Jesus was absolute and unlimited. Even a single word from the Lord (cf. Matt 8:16; Ps 107:20) spoken at a distance could heal his servant, for the Spirit of the Lord was present with Jesus to heal (Luke 5:17). No doubt Luke would long for his readers, as well as for the church today, to have such faith.

**7:8** The centurion explained his faith in Jesus by giving an illustration of authority. If the centurion with his authority could simply order certain things done, how much more (*a fortiori*) could Jesus as “Lord” do the same.

**For I myself am a man under authority.** This can be interpreted to mean that just as the centurion was under authority and thus could do things because of that authority, so Jesus, being under divine authority, had greater power and could give orders to heal his servant in God’s name (cf. 5:17). It can also be interpreted in a concessive sense as, “Even though I am a man under authority, I can still give orders, but you Jesus have even more power since you are not under authority.” However, we interpret this phrase, Luke was not seeking to downplay Jesus’ authority but to emphasize it.

**7:9 I have not found such great faith even in Israel.** In Luke’s context the centurion became a symbol of believing Gentiles who stood in contrast to unbelieving Jews, so that what was true in Jesus’ situation became even more true in the Evangelist’s. By adding 8:11–12 at this point (in Luke this appears later in 13:28–29), Matthew heightened this contrast between unbelieving Israel and believing Gentiles. Yet for both Matthew and Luke, this affirmation of the centurion’s faith served as support and encouragement for the acceptance of Gentiles into the church.

**7:10** As in all miracle stories, proof of the healing is given.

### The Lukan Message

It is difficult to read this story without thinking of how Luke in Acts described the spread of the gospel to the Gentile world. This story clearly foreshadows the later Gentile mission. We find some obvious parallels between this story and Cornelius’s conversion in Acts 10. Luke no doubt sought to help the church of his day understand how the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church was foreshadowed and envisioned by Jesus during his earthly ministry. He may even have hoped that this account would help Christian Jews and Gentiles in his day to welcome each other in the fellowship of the church. Nolland observes, “In the later church the existence of such a Gentile who had manifested such an outstanding spiritual perception and responsiveness would have served as a strong argument against the exclusion of Gentiles on principle from Christian fellowship.”

In the present context, however, this account serves an even more important Christological function. In 7:1–50 Luke answered the question, “Who is this Jesus?” and showed how the programmatic sermon of 4:16–30 was being fulfilled. Jesus had been anointed (4:18) and the power of the Lord was present with him (5:17), so that he could bring the blessings of God’s kingdom (4:18–19). Shortly, John the Baptist would raise the question, “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” (7:20). Jesus would respond affirmatively by pointing out that the promises of the messianic age were being fulfilled (7:22–23). Luke wanted his readers to see in the present miracle a proof that Jesus is indeed the awaited Messiah. He possesses a unique authority. Even at a distance a single word brings instant healing. “Who is this one who possesses such authority?” The answer is clear. Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God, the Lord!