

The Faith of the Centurion, Part 1

Luke 7:1-5

January 7, 2018

We are in Luke Chapter 7. We're going to be opening, looking in that opening narrative there on the remarkable faith of a soldier. The faith of a Roman centurion. I wanna start this morning by reading that text, so read along with me if you have your Bibles open to Luke 7:1 through 10. "After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people he entered Capernaum. Now a centurion had a servant who was sick, and at the point of death who is highly valued by him. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying 'He is worthy to have you do this for him. For he loves our nation and he is the one who built us our synagogue.'

"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. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. 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." 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." And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well."

I have to warn you upfront that, although I very much wanted to and plan to get through all ten of those verses today, I just can't. I tried, and I tried and told everybody I was gonna get through ten verses. Maybe the Lord heard my futile boast and humbled me. So just before printing off my sermon this morning, I made an eleventh hour decision to cut this in half. Because otherwise I would need an hour and a half to preach to you this morning. So I just, I need to do justice to the entire passage and the only way to do that is to cover it in two weeks. I'm sorry, okay? I really did want it, because it's so powerful, impactful when you can get through the whole thing. But until

the elders say “Travis, you have two hours to preach every Sunday.” I’m just going to have to stick with my futile attempts to try to get it all in alright?

So, with that said, the main focus of this narrative is the faith of the centurion. It’s indicated clearly there by Jesus’ reaction in verse 9 where he marveled, he said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” That word marvel, *thaumazo* in the Greek, it’s, it’s not an uncommon word in the New Testament in the Gospels especially. It describes the natural reaction that people have to Jesus.

Seeing his miracles, seeing his unparalleled power, power over nature, power over demons, he calms storms, he, he heals leprosy, he does all kinds of, his unparalleled authoritative teaching, his insightful responses and answers to those who would be like the inquisition sent to trip him up. People marvel at Jesus. What is not common, however, is to read about Jesus marveling at something else.

I mean how would he? He is the second person of the Trinity, he is God himself, he created all that is. How is it that this one marvels at anything, except God and God alone. This is one of only two places in the entire New Testament where it says that Jesus marveled. Jesus marvels here as we see over the faith of the centurion. And later on, when he returns to his hometown synagogue at Nazareth, it says in Mark 6:6 that Jesus is going to marvel again. But there, "because of their unbelief." So we see two places in Scripture that we read about Jesus marveling, and both times his astonishment has to do with faith.

He marvels at the presence of extraordinary faith in a Gentile centurion, where this kind of faith is not expected. And he marveled at the absence of an expected faith, among his own people, the Jews, especially those in Nazareth, where they saw his upbringing, saw his, his life. They saw his family, they saw how he conducted himself, saw him without sin. They ought to believe and they didn't and so Jesus marveled.

So we want to discover today and as it turns out next week, we want to discover what was it about this centurion's faith that made Jesus marvel. I'm gonna give you a little hint. What makes Jesus marvel is God and God alone, and the faith that's represented by this centurion is a faith that comes from God and God alone.

So we want to be thinking as we hear about this, we want to obviously be reflecting on our own faith. What does our faith look like? We want to reflect on the nature of our faith, the character of our own faith. Even the strength of our own faith as we reflect on them, think about that, going through this narrative going through this story. Would our faith call forth Jesus' rebuke like, "oh, you of little faith. Why do you doubt?"

Or, would Jesus marvel at our faith? Like he did over the faith of this Gentile centurion. Would he see in us a faith that comes from God? Would he see a faith that's pure and unmixed by any doubt? Would he see in us a faith that is pure and unmixed by any distraction? Any other love? Any other interest? What would he find?

Before we take a closer look at the centurion, we want to be mindful of the larger context here. For that I'd like to, you to look back at what Luke wrote there verse 1, Luke 7:1. He keeps this narrative about the centurion's faith connected with what we just studied in the Sermon on the Mount. Luke writes there verse 1, "After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people he entered Capernaum." The word finished there in the Greek is, is the word *pleroo*, meaning fulfilled or completed it, it's a word that refers often times to the fulfilment of prophesy. To the fulfilment of Scripture. To the fulfillment of a, of a commission. And Jesus here has fulfilled or completed all of his sayings. All his teachings.

Does that mean Jesus has no more to say? No. It's talking about this sermon that he just preached. The sermon had, as we saw when we studied it, it had an introduction, had a main body, it had a conclusion. The main point of the sermon, he was giving an exposition of that ancient command from Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." That's the very

foundation of the church. It's a well-crafted sermon as we've seen.

It's inspired volume upon volumes of study and exposition. Amazing sermon and it was a completed body of work. So in making the transition here in verse 1, from the Sermon on the Mount into this narrative, Luke wants us to make sure that we do not miss the connection. He wants us not to make a radical separation between what Jesus just taught and what we're about to discover in this narrative. We need to keep the context in mind because it is essential to understanding the impact and the import of this centurion, and how he illustrates so much of what's in the Sermon on the Mount. I'm gonna have more to say about the larger context next time, but in this near context, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus has here just described in that sermon the character of genuine discipleship.

Genuine disciples look like the Sermon on the Mount. They live according to the Sermon on the Mount. Genuine discipleship is manifest in a sacrificial forbearing, generous, compassionate kind of love. It's a kind of love that comes only from God, and

from God alone. And here in Luke 7, 1 through 10, Luke wants us to see, exhibit A, of the kind of person Jesus just described in the Sermon on the Mount.

And remarkably, it's a Gentile, not a Jew. Remarkably, it's not just any citizen, it's a centurion. So Luke wants his Gentile readers, and starting with, the one to whom this volume is addressed, the most excellent Theophilus, he wants his Gentile readers, us included, to see an illustration of true discipleship. Which is marked by the character of genuine saving faith. This Gentile centurion, he is, in spite of all of his, anything that may commend him in a worldly sense. This Gentile centurion is among the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the hated. He is the very kind of person that Jesus has described as blessed, "blessed is he."

So with just a brief introduction, let's get into our outline for this morning written in your bulletin. We're only getting into half of it, as I mentioned, but let's start with the first point, the surprising situation. Surprising situation.

Look at verse 1 again, “After he’d finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people he entered Capernaum.” We’re not really sure how long he was there in Capernaum before hearing from the centurion. There’s no time reference provided, but it couldn’t have been too long. After coming back from the mountain side, where he taught the crowds, Mark wrote about this time in Mark 3:20 that Jesus went home. That is back to Peter’s home, Peter’s house, where he was staying when he visited Capernaum. And it says that there in Mark 3:20 that the crowd gathered again so that they, the disciples and Jesus, could not even eat. And they were crushing in on the town, crushing in on Peter’s home. They couldn’t even get a meal together.

So there’s still this massive crowd of people in attendance; they’re not only from Capernaum but, as Luke 17 says, there’s a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. So, looks like all those folks are not ready to go home just yet. They want to see more, they want to hear more, from Jesus. You can hardly fault them for that.

And then in verse 2, Luke introduces us to this situation. And the way he has written about this in the original text, it comes across as quite surprising. The English reads this, “Now a centurion had a servant who was sick, and at the point of death.” And it makes it sound in that translation like the centurion is the subject of the sentence. He’s not.

At this point, he’s almost incidental. In fact, in the original he’s just a certain centurion. There’s actually a word that says certain, just a certain guy, doesn’t have a name even in the text. He’s not even placed grammatically, though, as the subject of the sentence. It’s actually the servant who’s in focus here.

And the word is *doulos*, which means slave. Not someone who is hired like a servant. But a slave, someone who is owned. So this slave, he is the subject of the sentence. In the most literal, the maybe, maybe accurate way to render that opening sentence is this way. Now the slave of a certain centurion was sick and about to die. Or, if we just whittle away all of that down to its bare essence: A slave was about to die.

A slave was about to die. You know the response of a first century reader, to that opening line, a slave was about to die. So what? So what? Slaves die all the time. They come, they go, they work, they die. What is the big deal? Just a slave. There were tens of millions of slaves throughout the Roman Empire. Some estimates run as high as 50 to 60 million people in slavery.

Italy had a population of five to six million people and 1.5 to 2 million of those people were slaves. In larger cities like Rome and Corinth, Ephesus, slaves made up one third of the total population. The city of Rome itself, population of 1.5 million citizens, there were 400,000 slaves in that city; even middle-class citizens owned an average of eight slaves per household.

So slavery was the unquestioned, normal way of the world, of the entire world. There was no hue and cry against the institution of slavery like there is today. There's nothing strange about slavery in the first century mind. There's nothing

necessarily inhumane about slavery in that time. There were humane and inhumane ways of treating one's slaves but slave owners by and large considered their slaves to be their personal property, or the, the property of the estate.

They had the potential of being very useful tools to the slave owner. In fact, that's what Aristotle believed. Famous quote, "A slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave." That's how Aristotle thought about it. That's how the first century world thought about it.

So in the first century world, a subject line like a slave was about to die, hardly raise an eyebrow. Say it to most people response would be, so? Why write about it? That's one of the many things I love about the New Testament. It's written not in the twenty first century. Where it's cool to write about anti-slavery kind of stuff.

No, this was written in the first century and this is completely countercultural, because Luke begins this narrative

by counting this slave to be important. Putting him as the subject of the sentence. He's grammatically the subject. He puts him in the center of the situation and Luke demands just by the way he has written this, that we, the readers, see the slave's life-threatening illness as worthy of our attention and our concern. Because that's how the centurion saw him.

That's how God sees him. That's what's surprising about this situation. We're introduced to the character of the centurion, here, in kind of an oblique way, but we're introduced to the servant, the slave, right in the center. And now we see the centurion, introduced to him as a man, marked by a remarkable kindness.

He's a kind man. He's one who is genuinely, truly concerned about this slave. It says in verse 2, the slave was "sick and at the point of death." Over in Matthew 8:6, parallel passage, we learned that slave was paralyzed. He, he was immobile and, and yet he didn't have the advantage of dead nerve endings.

His nerve endings and pain receptors were all still firing because it also says in Matthew 8, he was suffering terribly. Other translations say he was grievously tormented, feeling great pain, suffering terrible anguish. Centurion doesn't respond to this situation like, like most centurions or most even citizens probably would, by counting this living tool as a throwaway tool and looking for a replacement. Centurion here sees the slave as a man. Created in God's image.

Even more than a man, someone he really cared for. It says, verse 2, that this slave was, was highly valued by him. The translation could lead us to believe the centurion found the slave really, really useful. Hard to replace. Like a really good drill you like, you know you don't wanna throw it away 'cause, I can't get a good deal and have this drill fitted to my hand. That's not the idea here.

He didn't just hate to lose him because of utilitarian reasons only. The word here is *entimos*, which can mean respected, esteemed, even highly honored. So it's not just a matter of utilitarian usefulness, it's not a matter of that.

It's, it's not even just a matter of esteem and honor, as if the slave had noble character. The word here *entimos* can also mean a deep affection, and that's how the King James translators render it. The, the centurion's slave was, I love this, "dear unto him." Dear unto him.

Down in verse 7, look at it there, the centurion, when he entreats the Lord through his friends. He says, "Let my servant be healed." Same word, but the word for servant there it's not *doulas*, it's not the word for servant either. It's the word *pais*, which means child; like a son or like a daughter. And that is an odd, rather surprising way for a centurion to speak of a slave, but that is how this centurion was.

He was a kind, tender man. And he considered this dying slave like his own child. He spoke of this, this man as an, it, with an intimate affection. Slave isn't just a living tool to him. He's a highly valued, highly esteemed human being, but even more than that, he's one who's dear to him.

It's a surprising way to introduce the story. But introduced to the surprising situation, this is where we're going to see the character of the centurion become even clearer in the next verse, verse 3. Where he poses a second point, second point, the bold question. In your outline, the bold question. It's not just the question itself, but it's, it's how he asked it.

Says in verse 3, "When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant." The centurion he sends a delegation to Jesus. He's used to sending delegations. He's used to sending representatives to speak on his behalf, emissaries. He's confident that whomever he sends is going to convey whatever message he sends with them.

That's abundantly clear over in Matthew's account. Because over in Matthew's account, Matthew does not even mention the delegation. He puts the question in the centurion's mouth as if he is physically present, even though we know from Luke's gospel he's not. He asked Jesus to come and heal his servant.

He knows that the message is going to be conveyed without obstruction, without change. Luke, though, wants us to see the delegation. He wants us to see the use of intermediaries. Because it's important to his purpose for us to understand the kind of man this is. It's going to become clear as we see the second delegation later on in the text. But the word centurion comes from a Latin word for one hundred. It's *centurio* or *century*, we get the word century from that.

Centurion, he's the highest ranking noncommissioned officer. So, master chief in the Navy or master sergeant in the Army, Air Force. He's the highest ranking noncommissioned officer in a Roman legion and as a centurion, he commanded a company size formation anywhere between fifty and a hundred men.

Roman centurions, they were highly respected because they came up through the ranks as soldiers. Centurions, they would have had many military campaigns under their belts visited many as they say, join the Marines, travel to far and exotic places,

see interesting and exciting people, and kill them. You know that's, that's kind of this guy.

He's traveling all over the world doing Rome's bidding. He's seen many things. He's been involved in many battles, many wars. He would have fought side by side with the men that he commanded. So a centurion's reputation, for courage and valor it would have been known by those to whom it matters most. The people you serve with. The respect granted to centurions, it's not just on the basis of rank alone.

These guys are known by their men. They're known by those who know. They've distinguished themselves in battle as soldiers first, in submission to authority, able to take commands, able to be directed. But then they've risen up through the ranks, not only knowing how to take orders, but how to give them too. They've become leaders.

It's notable that on every occasion in Scripture, centurions are esteemed. They're portrayed in a, in a

respectable way. They're men have dignity and wealth and influence. They're highly regarded and highly esteemed by others, Jew and Gentile alike. In fact, it's interesting to me that a centurion features here really early on in Luke's Gospel.

There's another notable centurion in Luke's second volume, named Cornelius, right? In Acts 10 we read about Cornelius. He called for Peter to come and preach this gospel to him about this, this Jesus. He brought together his entire family, his entire household, which along with all the slaves that were owned, it was quite a number of people and they were all saved. Radically saved by the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit fell upon them all. They all praised God in other languages, just as the Jews had done on the day of Pentecost. That's a centurion as well.

They're remarkable people. They were used to living in, in occupied territory like this centurion is living here. He's likely attached to a regiment in the service of Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas lived down the coast of the Sea of Galilee on the western side, in Tiberias, named for his benefactor, the emperor

Tiberius. Was located on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee, just southwest of Capernaum. And Antipas, he wanted a Roman garrison up in Capernaum to protect his interests.

He had tax revenue coming in from the fishing industry. He had tax revenue coming in and customs dues from traders who traveled in and out of his territory on the Via Maris, which was an ancient trade route that connected Mesopotamia with Egypt. So this centurion is stationed there. He's, along with the Roman garrison that he commanded, he's there to ensure the orderly collection of taxes. He's there to police the population. He's even there to protect the population from any unsavory characters who moved in and out of town.

It was really a rather dangerous assignment. Especially on the outskirts of Galilee, this border town, Capernaum. This centurion, he had seen enough battle, he'd been stationed in enough occupied territories to know that he had to treat these indigenous people, who were a conquered people, he had to treat them with respect.

By conducting himself, and commanding his men with wisdom, he knew, and he taught them to know how to live within a hostile environment in peace. How to live and police that population in peace. So this centurion, verse 3 it says, he'd "heard about Jesus." When? When did he hear about Jesus, how did he hear about Jesus? The news gets around, doesn't it?

News reports have been continuously flowing in. They've been growing in intensity and in frequency ever since the days of John the Baptist. In fact, remember back in, turn back in your Bibles to Luke Chapter 3. Luke 3:14, some of the characters who showed up at John's baptism, what are they, soldiers right? Soldiers showed up there. They're very likely also in the service of Herod Antipas, back in Luke 3:3, it says that "John went in to all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." It says there in verse 7, he told the crowds who came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers," Oh, soldiers like a guy like that, "you brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance and don't begin to say to yourselves we have Abraham as our father." Now pagan, Gentile soldiers are perking up their ears. Yeah, don't

say Abraham's your father. Don't rely on that. "For I tell you," verse 8, "God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham."

Again, comfort to a Gentile. "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the tree every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. And the crowds asked him 'what then shall we do?'" So he answered them very similar to what Jesus teaches, "whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none. Whoever has food is to do likewise." Be generous, share, be kind, love your neighbor. "Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, 'teacher, what shall we do' He said, collect no more than you're authorized to do."

Soldiers who often were the strong arms for the tax collectors, "They asked him as well, 'What shall we do?'" We, we ourselves? Soldiers like us? Soldiers who really don't belong in any of this company. Who killed a lot of people. What should we do? "He said to them, 'Don't extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation. Be content with your wages.'" As the

people were in expectation, all were questioning in their hearts concerning John whether he might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, 'I baptize you with water. But he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn,' those are the those who are baptized by the Holy Spirit, 'and the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.'" There's the baptism of fire.

So grace and judgment. That's this one who's coming. With any of, "Many other exhortations, he preached good news to the people." Now that had, all of that had to be encouraging for pagan soldiers. Those who were serving the interests of Rome in this remote outpost of the Roman Empire. And what intrigued them was the promise of this coming one. Someone who's even mightier than John. Someone who will receive soldiers like them, that made an impression on soldiers.

One more passage. How did the centurion hear about Jesus? When had he heard? Go over to John chapter 4. John chapter 4, end of chapter 4 after the, the whole conversation with the woman at the well. And the whole, really, revival among the Samaritans. John chapter 4 over in John 4:46. In John 4 it says there that Jesus healed the son of a, of a royal official, and the word there is a *basilikos*, someone who is also very likely in the service of Herod Antipas.

You know where this healing happened? At Capernaum. You know how it happened. Listen to this in John 4:46, "He came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine and at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. And when this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down to heal his son, for he was at the point of death. So Jesus said to him, 'Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.' And the official said to him, 'Sir, come down before my child dies.' Jesus said to him, 'Go your son will live.' The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went on his way, and as he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they

said to him yesterday at the seventh hour, the fever left him. The father knew that it was the hour when Jesus had said to him. 'Your son will live.' He himself believed and all his household."

Now you think word got around. You think maybe with he and his entire household believing, that they kept that to themselves. No. Believers talk about what God has done for them. And when they talk, they get excited, and they rejoice, and that joy cannot be contained. The word about Jesus, been going around a long time. Very likely come to the centurion, whether from the soldiers who were at John's baptism, or whether from the members of the nobleman's household, or those who knew them or all the above.

Not only that, you can go back to Luke 7, not only that, but, that synagogue that was in Capernaum. That one that he himself had built, Jesus had cast a demon out of the, a man there in that synagogue. Reports about what Jesus had done during his itinerant ministry throughout the region, that had made it back to him. All about the miracles, the healings, all

of his acts of compassion and kindness. Very likely the centurion had heard about all that too.

And now, Capernaum, he's stationed around there, and this massive throng of people has swelled the population. There's people from Judea and Jerusalem, from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon. And the population of sleepy little Capernaum has mushroomed in size. So it's his business to know what's going on, because when there are massive crowds, for anybody who's in a police force, there are massive problems, aren't there?

The centurion, he's pretty well informed about Jesus. No doubt he's very curious. And now there's a situation that arises within his own household. It gives him the opportunity to make contact. He's in dire need here. His beloved dear servant is sick and paralyzed and, and in pain, and he's facing an imminent death. So the centurion is compelled by the problem that he's faced with. He's emboldened by what he's heard about Jesus, that this man and this man alone can heal my beloved servant.

So he makes contact. Verse 3 says, “He sent to Jesus elders of the Jews asking him to come and heal his servant.” Because of his role. Because of his status and his wealth. We might add to because of his wisdom as a commander of an occupying force. The centurion had become friends with some of the leading Jewish elders of Capernaum.

Although these Jewish elders are not at all under his command, though they’re not in his employ, they’re eager to act as his emissaries. They’re eager to take his question and his request to Jesus to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant. We find out why in the next two verses, which is our third point. The persuasive petition. The persuasive petition.

Look there in verse 4. It says when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly. The verb tense there makes it clear that they were urging him repeatedly. They were imploring Jesus over and over again. They didn’t just ask once and walk away, they just kept at it. They’re earnest in this petition. They’re persistent, they’re urgent.

Now, under any normal conditions, it is rather odd for Jews to petition on behalf of Gentiles. They just don't do that. In fact, for this to happen is, is incredible. And to do so aggressively, persistently, earnestly, repeatedly, that's actually undignified for men of their caliber, as elders in the community, to basically beg like this.

As we keep reading, though, we discover the reason for their persistence. They say, 'He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation. And he is the one who built us our synagogue.' What's their argument in a word? He's worthy. He's worthy. As Jewish elders they're appealing to Jesus. Yes, Jesus is some kind of a prophet. He's obviously got the hand of God on him, because he's a miracle worker. He's probably even Messiah; kind of, jury's out on that. But he really should take their judgment as elders. Their experience, their wisdom, Jesus should take all of that under careful advisement, because after all, in their estimation, this man is worthy.

The word worthy, *axios* in Greek, *axios* in its strict literal usage it means to kind of like, axis. It, it, it's

bringing up the, the other beam of the scales as in, this guy balances the scales. He measures up. He is solid. They're basically saying he is, Jesus, he's, he's upright, he's worthy, he's therefore entitled to, and they're even deserving of your attention. For this use of your resources, this is a good investment for you, Jesus. After all, he's favorable to us. He has done for us. It's only fitting that we return the favor and do something favorable for him. With you as our representative, Jesus with your power, the power of God at your hand, it's only fitting.

Sheds a little light, doesn't it, on the Jewish ethical perspective? In fact, isn't this how most people think? Isn't this how you and I think, tend to think most of the time about doing good to others. Do unto others, and if and only if they have done for us well, we'll consider doing for them. It's not what Jesus just taught, is it?

Two reasons here for this centurion's worthiness. Two reasons which entitle him to at least one miracle. He loves our nation and he is the one who built us our synagogue. Now keep in

mind, this is the testimony of an occupied people. This is the testimony of people in Galilee of all places. Galilee is home to a strong nationalistic fervor.

Judas the Galilean, he's mentioned in Acts 5:37. He had led a recent revolt against the Romans. His followers were aligned with the zealot party. Some of those guys in the zealot party were terrorists, known as Sicarii, a group of Jewish assassins. They got their name from the *sicae*, the, the small dagger that they concealed in the folds of their garment. They would take that dagger, they would, they would go into a crowd, and they were known to assassinate public figures in public, in a crowd. Slicing them in lethal areas with that dagger. They were experts at it.

Part of the Jewish Zealot party. That all was centered in Galilee. Even the milder pro-Israel dissent of the Pharisees party was very strong in Galilee. In fact, that's where a lot of them came from. The Jewish elders were very likely not only aligned with the Pharisees, they were probably Pharisees themselves. Many of the lay leaders attached to the synagogue

were zealous Pharisees. They longed to see God's Word proclaimed. They longed to see God's favor on Israel.

So the fact that this centurion had won, not just the respect, but even more than that, the advocacy of these Jewish elders in Capernaum, that is remarkable. How did this centurion win their support? He loves our nation. He loves our nation. And he's the one who built us our synagogue.

It's interesting to me that their emphasis is on the love that he has. Present tense, ongoing continuous love. His love, continuous for the Jewish nation. It's the word *agapao* that supreme kind of love that Jesus just commanded in the Sermon on the Mount. From the mouth of these Jews, they testify to what they see in this centurion. They cannot deny this testimony of love.

How highly he esteems the Jewish people. How he sacrifices of himself of his money for their highest good, doing what's best for them with their interests at heart. Powerful testimony.

The evidence of his love, he built them a synagogue. I can point to it. It's a physical edifice, it's a building. It's actually reportedly the highest tallest building in Capernaum.

The emphasis comes out in the translation. First of the physical evidence of this centurion's love, and second of his personal investment in it. The, the grammar puts it this way, the synagogue he himself built for us, using his own personal funds, involving no one else. The centurion and the centurion alone, he is responsible for the synagogue we attend. Responsible for the synagogue Jesus attended the one in which Jesus taught. The one in which he had cast out the demon. No one else but the centurion is responsible for that. In fact, without that centurion, they would not have a synagogue.

Now, Gentile patronage was not unheard of in the first century world. We find archaeological evidence of Gentile patronage in ancient inscriptions. There are building projects, infrastructure improvements, there's even one inscription that recognize a Gentile for building the Jews a house of prayer.

Even Herod the Great himself, he built and beautified the temple in Jerusalem. But this kind of patronage, by this centurion, not at all common. Capernaum started as a small fishing village. It grew into a large village or town, but there was nothing there worth investing in. But it became large enough to attract the attention of those who wanted to tax it. Those who wanted to benefit from it. But the town and its people were nonetheless quite poor.

So the kindness of this unnamed centurion, he built the first and only synagogue of Capernaum. That's something. His kindness here is not notable, just as an act of generous patronage, though it was. It was notable because of the motivation. It was love. Love for the nation.

It was notable because of the purpose of a synagogue, which was for the teaching of Scripture. This Gentile had an interest in the Word of God, taught weekly, taught throughout the week as a tool to shape the mind and the character of people as a tool to disciple and raise families, to perpetuate the holy name of

God, to reveal this God's mind to the whole community, that's important to him.

Just to put this in perspective for you. This would kind of be like, it's a rough analogy, imperfect, but it would be like a master sergeant in the American army. Stationed in Iraq, maybe in Mosul? He represents an occupying force. He had to lose a lot of men to take it. Now these there in Mosul, he represents that occupying force, and he's not wanted in that country. And yet he personally funds the building of a mosque.

What happens in mosques? Pro-American sentiment? Is the teaching there good for the occupying force? Not at all. This centurion though, he's come to think in such a way as to transcend his Romanness. As to think higher than just nationality, ethnicity. He thinks about spreading God's Word as something that's a good for all humanity.

In fact, I personally think that that's why he knew these Jewish elders. Not just as men that he needed to know to do his

job, but he wanted them to teach him what they were learning in the synagogue. Why? Because after all he is a Gentile, really couldn't enter the synagogue. He couldn't mix in there. He built them a building that they could enter and he could not.

He's a God fearer; he's not a proselyte. By the way, a proselyte to the Jewish faith went through painful circumcision, went through ritual baptism and everything, and he was counted as a fellow Jew. This guy is not. He doesn't want Jesus to come under his roof.

Not because he doesn't want Jesus there, but because he's respecting the boundary. He's a God fearer. He remained apart from the Jews. So as a God fearer he respects that distance. He respects that distinction. He recognizes like the Syria-Phoenician woman in Matthew 15. I'm just a Gentile dog. I wanna eat the scraps, though, that fall from the master's table. So would you come after you hear in the synagogue the teaching of the Word of God, would you come and read it to me? Would you come and share it with me?

And you see this guy's humility. He wanted to invest in God's Word. Beautiful picture of a very worthy investment in a remote place. The Jews find the centurion here worthy of Jesus. We can understand their reasoning. I want to stop here for a moment though, to reflect on this man's character just a little more.

Because the picture is starting to emerge for us, they really should have us scratching our heads. How did this guy get to be this guy? I mean is he just born noble? The commentator J.C. Ryle, he ponders that question, and he surmises that the centurion could have only learned his kindness, whether toward his slave, as a man or toward the Jewish nation, this level of kindness of love could only come through exposure to the God of Israel. Which could only come through the Scripture, and by the grace of God himself.

Here's what J.C. Ryle said and some of his reflections. He asked, "Where did the centurion learn this kindness? How can we account for one who was a heathen by birth and a soldier by profession, showing such a spirit as this? Habits of mind like

these were not likely to be gleaned from heathen teaching or promoted by the society of a Roman camp. Greek and Latin philosophy would not recommend them. Tribunes, consuls, prefects, and emperors would not encourage them. There's only one way to account with the centurion's character. The centurion was what he was by the grace of God. The Spirit had opened the eyes of his understanding and put a new heart within him. His knowledge of divine things, no doubt, was very dim, but his religious views were probably built on a very imperfect acquaintance with the Old Testament Scriptures. But whatever the light he had from above, it influenced his life. And resulted in the kindness described in this passage." End quote.

In my few years on Earth, I've run into a lot of people with a lot of knowledge, I'm sure you have too. And sometimes I'm taken aback by how inconsistently people use that knowledge. How unfaithfully they treat it? How little that knowledge has affected their character. And on the other hand, I've come across people who have very little knowledge. Maybe they had, didn't grow up in a good church or weren't exposed to great teaching. And yet, with the little that they do know, it's remarkable how consistently, how faithfully they practice that

truth. It's incredible to see the mark of God's grace on their life.

Knowledge alone puffs up, but what, love, what, edifies right? Love edifies. This man had been changed. This man is different. The evidence of the centurion's love is clear, unmistakable and it means the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in his life is also clear and unmistakable too, right?

This man was what he was by the grace of God. Chosen by sovereign election. Regenerated by the Holy Spirit, then saved as Christ would later on atone for all of his sins on that cross at Calvary. Also attended, by the way, by a centurion. Who remarked when he saw him, "Truly this man was the son of God."

So the evidence of the grace of God in this man's life couldn't be clearer. As a Gentile, representing the conquering nation of Rome, representing the intruding, extorting, polluting influence of Rome. Just like many of the troops represent the

polluting, distorting, degrading influence of America in other parts of the world.

That's how they see it. He's living among a people who are nationally, religiously, ethnically, politically disinclined toward him. They're more likely to hate him than anything else, and to hate him with a passion. But even they can see in his attitudes, in his actions which are personally sacrificial, in no way personally enriching, they see his love for them.

That is instructive to us, isn't it? This centurion has become a living, breathing illustration to the Jews, to this crowd, verse 9, which is following along behind Jesus. He's a living illustration of the kind of love that Jesus just taught about in the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, turn back to the Sermon on the Mount just for one moment. It won't hurt us to read this again.

Luke 6:31. Luke 6:31, "And as you wish that others would do to you, do also to them. If you love those who love you, what

benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. But love your enemies and do good and lend expecting nothing in return. And your reward will be great and you will be sons of the most high, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil."

You think this man was a son of the Most High? Did he do good and lend expecting nothing in return? There was another man who followed Jesus this day. For whom this lesson was massive. This man wasn't just a part of the crowd, he was a member of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples. In fact, Jesus had just named him before the Sermon on the Mount, he named him as one of the Twelve.

He's the final name in Luke 6:15, Simon who is called the zealot. I mean, he was an America first kind of a guy. Only it was Israel first. For Simon to see the love of God transcend

that Jewish Gentile division to unite all those who love like Jesus taught them to love, to unite them all into one people. That had to have had a profound impact on Simon the zealot. This centurion was for Simon, for Theophilus the Gentile patron of Luke's gospel, and really, for all of us, he's an immediate illustration of the kind of Kingdom citizen that Jesus just taught them about.

He's the one who loved. He's the one who did them good. He's the one who lent to them expecting nothing in return, and that is a kind of love that spoke volumes, as does our Christian love now today, speak volumes. And so it says there at the beginning of verse 6, Luke 7:6, when Jesus went with them. I'd imagine he's intrigued. He has no racial prejudice in him, after all he created all people from one man. He's eager to grant this centurion the request that he made, not for himself, but for the good of his slave, because Jesus is by nature, kind and compassionate. Then we come to a curious turn in the narrative beginning in verse 6. But we're gonna have to leave it there for now and come back next week to get the rest of the story. Let's pray.

GRACE CHURCH



Grace

Father, we want to thank you for what we've learned and reflected on this morning. The faith of the centurion which was most notable in its connection to the Sermon on the Mount, which is all about the love that you command for all of us as your disciples, as Kingdom citizens, as the love were to be known for. And this centurion was known by his love. We're certain we're going to see him in heaven. To be able to talk to him about this day, the day that he entreated Jesus to heal his slave. I'm sure there are many other stories like that to share, but all of them marked by a unifying love that comes directly from you Father.

We pray Father, that we'd be like the centurion marked by love, a remarkable love that does good for others, and expects nothing in return that's sacrificial and generous. I love how this centurion loved your Word, Father, and, we like that centurion also want to weekly regularly often expose your Word to as many people as possible. That is an investment worth making. And I want to thank you for this church and so many people who give so generously for that purpose. Because we want to be a people that magnifies and upholds your Word. We want to see people changed. We want to see people saved. We want to see



them sanctified and grow to manifest this kind of character. So father with that prayer in mind and this text in mind we just pray that you would honor that for the sake of Jesus Christ and his Gospel. It's in his name, we pray, amen.