

The Faith of the Centurion, Part 2

Luke 7:6-10

January 14, 2018

I want to welcome you back to part two of what we began last week. So, you wanna grab your Bibles and turn over to Luke 7 and let's finish the story of the Faith of the Centurion. We're going to start here, as we do, by reading the account, I'll provide a short review, and then we'll pick up the story in verse 6. But first, let's, let's just read it together.

Luke 7:1 through 10 is the text. "After he," Jesus, "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 was 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."

As we said last time, the main focus of this narrative and the object of our attention is the faith of the centurion. That's very clear from verse 9 where Luke just told us that Jesus marveled. It's one of, just, only two places in the New

Testament that says, Jesus marveled. It's the word, *thaumazo*, in the Greek; a verb that usually describes the reaction of other people to Jesus in his ministry, whether seeing displays of his power or his authority, his miracles, his teaching. But here it describes Jesus. It portrays him as the one who is astonished, marveling at the amazing faith of this, this Gentile centurion.

We saw last time, that Luke opens the narrative, drawing our attention to the plight of a, a sick and a, a suffering dying slave. And this, really, is meant to introduce us to the remarkable character of this centurion, who is a kind man. He's loving. He's tender. You will see more of that character on display today.

But what Luke wants us to really see, after introducing us to the character of the centurion, through the plight of the slave; what he wants us to see, and what stops Jesus in his tracks; what astonishes him is the centurion's faith. It's his faith. It's a divinely generated faith that explains this centurion. It's not some inherent goodness on his part. It's not some, he's not just a great guy. He's someone that God has, by

his Spirit, been working in his life. What makes the centurion truly remarkable is not the centurion, it's the grace of God, manifest in this kind of faith, toward Christ.

Now I wanna point out, in, before we kind of get into the flow of the text, we have just really, as we read that, we have just encountered a profound mystery, here in the text; one that really does call us to stop and ponder and it has to do with the mystery and the wonder of the incarnation. Here's, here's what I mean by that; we know that Jesus Christ is both truly God and, also, truly man. He is both the Son of the living God, according to Luke 1:35, also, he is the Son of man, according to Luke 5:24, 6:5, 6:22, and so on.

But the son, the Son of God, from eternity past at the Father's side; he is sent from the Father's side, John 1:1 and 2, John 1:18. He was there from eternity past, at the Father's side, and he's sent by God. And when he took on flesh, he didn't descend from the clouds in some glorious magnificent way, like some alien invading from outer space, or some Greek hero god, or something like that, coming down in an impressive fashion.

The Son of God, when he came to earth, when he incarnated, he took on humanity in the most normal way, by means of natural childbirth. Supernatural conception; natural childbirth. By the miraculous conception within the virgin's womb, he was born of a woman, born of Mary, Luke 1:30 to 35. And in that sense there is truly no one like him.

So, when we read about the one and only son of God, this *monogenes*, from the father, who possesses all the attributes of deity; when we realize that, but then, also, see him hungering, thirsting, getting tired, and yes, even marveling, it's yet another mark of his very real humanity. Marveling indicates surprise. It indicates, marveling portrays Jesus is facing something that he didn't expect and that tells us that Jesus, in his humanity, he knew what it was, at times, to discover things. He had the very human experience, one that we have all the time of encountering something new.

Now, that may make us feel slightly uncomfortable, those of us who are used to protecting and defending the full, true

deity of Jesus Christ. But we really do need to embrace Jesus Christ for who he actually is, as Scripture presents him to be, because the true deity and the true humanity of Christ, both are vital to our salvation and our sanctification.

Both of those truths guarantee our eternal salvation and secure our joy and our full assurance, in the truth of the Gospel. There is an instinct that we have to defend the true deity of Christ and that is a very good, healthy instinct, because there are still many today, who want to un-deify Jesus Christ. They want to reshape him and, re, recast him, as just a mere man. An enlightened man, liberals will grant and heretics will grant, but they will deny, against all biblical testimony, that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh.

We're right to insist on the apostolic testimony of Christ, like we find in John 1:1 through 3; like we find in Colossian 1:15 to 17. We covered that text on Christmas Eve. Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:1 to 3. We could go on and on, but we are right to believe the testimony of the apostles, who said, he is truly God. Right to believe the testimony of the father, who said from

heaven, "This is my beloved Son with," who, "whom I am well pleased." But, wa, we must not neglect his true humanity. We must not neglect, or set aside, or diminish in any way, that he is fully human in every way, yet without sin.

Since he is both true divinity and true humanity; divine nature, human nature, perfectly united in this one unique person, we must insist upon his true experience of humanity, as well. This is one of the profoundest mysteries in scripture, one that theologians call the hypostatic union: How the divine nature of the incarnated son of God, which is in union and perfect harmony with the human nature of Jesus. How those two natures interact with one another. How they interrelate.

That is a mystery, I really think we'll never fully comprehend, because we can't. This is completely outside of our understanding and experience, but we can wonder about it, can't we? It's revealed. The things revealed to us are for us and our children, forever, so we can wonder. We can ponder. We can marvel at what we read, and we should. Calls us to worship him as, "the only Son from the father, full of grace and truth."

And, so, as we read through, throughout the Gospel accounts, we read about Jesus becoming hungry and thirsty. We read about him becoming tired, needing to sleep, feeling both profound sorrow and intense pain. Then as we read in this passage, that Jesus also marveled in the new things that he experienced as a man, as the Christ. So how do we understand this?

Earlier in Luke's Gospel, you may remember, we read about the child Jesus, who was growing up, who got older, who matured. Says in Luke 2:40, "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom." We read after that verse, Luke tells us immediately how that boy Jesus, he's probably around 12 years old at the time, and he got lost on one of the trips to the temple. He was sitting at the feet of Jerusalem rabbis, listening to them and asking them questions.

Jesus studied Scripture. Just as he commends and commands us to do. He studied Scripture. He gleaned from the expositions of the teachers and he learned. So, Luke summarizes that

account, telling us in Luke 2:52 that, "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." How can the truly divine son of God learn anything? Isn't it true, Colossians 2, 9 and 10, that in him all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge are found. Isn't full deity in him? Absolutely it is. But, at the same time, in his humanity, he learned. He increased in wisdom.

As we follow his life and ministry, as we watch Jesus walking through the Gospel narratives, every now and again, we encounter something new, discovering something, like in this story. We find Jesus marveling over the faith of the centurion and where ever we see something like this, we need to stop, we need to recognize, that we are standing on holy ground.

We have stepped into the territory of profound mystery described in Philippians 2:6 and 7, "That though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped." Or you could say, a thing to be held onto, clutched onto, "but he emptied himself." That doesn't mean he divested himself of those attributes, no, they were there. "He took the

form of a servant," though, "and was born in the likeness of men." So those attributes are veiled by humanity and they only break out when God, by his Spirit, tells him to let them break forth.

So, in the likeness of men, there are things that are sometimes veiled from his understanding, like the timing of his second coming. He says, "No one knows the day or the hour, not even the Son of man, but my Father in heaven knows." So, in the likeness of men, verse 9, he stopped dead in his tracks to marvel, to turn to the crowd following him and to point out something that they need to observe very carefully.

So that is what we're doing today. We are the crowd of disciples. We're following after Jesus and we want to understand here what arrested Jesus' attention. We want to learn, this morning, what is it that made him marvel. And as we learn, we pray that God will grant us his grace, as well, to cause our faith to grow after the pattern, and in the character, and in the likeness of the amazing faith of this centurion.

We started last time with the first point in our outline: the surprising situation. Jesus entered Capernaum after completing his teaching, the Sermon the Mount. He was summoned to the home of a certain centurion because the centurion, verse 2, "he had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him," or as we mentioned last time, the slave was very dear to the centurion.

The centurion is known as one who loved people, even this lowly slave. But the centurion didn't think of the sick and dying man in, in merely utilitarian terms as a slave, a useful tool, like Aristotle did; just a living animate tool useful means for increasing productivity. This man, the centurion, spoke of this slave as his child, which is the original, what the original conveys in verse 7.

The slave is very likely the centurion's personal attendant, and under similar circumstances throughout the entire Roman Empire, which had millions of slaves like this and thousands of personal attendants, a sick and dying slave would have simply been replaced by a healthier model. But this

centurion isn't like that. He cares for this slave. He sees him as a human being. He sees him as created in the image of God and worth saving. Not just worth saving from death, but worth relieving of his suffering and his pain, preserving his life. It's a mark of the centurion's love and compassion.

And so, the centurion sends a delegation to Jesus, entreating the Lord for mercy, that's verse 3, second point in our outline. It should all be written in your bulletin, by the way. This second point is: the bold question. It says, "When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant."

We talked about, last time, how the centurion had been hearing about Jesus, very likely since the days of John the Baptist. Soldiers, who were in the service of Herod Antipas, as this centurion probably was as well, were probably stationed at the palace in Tiberius and attended John's baptisms, not far away. Heard about repentance. They'd heard about a coming Messiah, one who would baptize them with the Holy Spirit.

Centurion probably also heard about the nobleman, the, roll, royal official in John 4:46 to 53; how Jesus had healed that man's son and with just a word. Jesus wasn't even physically present to touch that boy's body. That power is a power that transcends space. So, this centurion, you know, he's been around. He's familiar with the kind of power that exists in this material world, and this centurion knew this is not human power. This is divine.

This is something completely different. Not only that, but the centurion sees that this is power that's used very differently than he'd ever seen. He was very familiar, with power of men. He was actually at the pointy end of the spear in the Roman army. He is there to destroy, use power to subdue, use power to make people line up to submit to the, to the will, and the might of Rome.

This power, the power that Jesus possessed is being used for kindness, for mercy, for the good of people. It's an extension of compassion, and it's given freely. It's given without charge. It expects nothing in return. So having heard of

this Jesus, of this power, and that Jesus had just returned to Capernaum, the centurion pounces on the opportunity.

He sends the Jewish elders to make his appeal, very surprising, by the way, that these Jewish elders act as the centurion's emissaries. They are not acting here at all under compulsion. They're not conscripted into service. They're not pressed into this. They go willingly. They go eagerly.

And that's what we see in verses 4 to 5; point number three: Their persuasive petition. Persuasive petition, verses 4 to 5, "When they came to Jesus, they pleaded", or, the, the verb tense there is imperfect, they kept on pleading 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.'" Now, if we can set aside, for a moment that, what we talked about last time, that give to get ethic on the part of the Jewish elders, their, their, they had a works oriented, merit-based mindset.

We saw last time that the Jewish elders, they weren't wrong here to emphasize and commend the centurion's character. I mean, here is a soldier, a Roman soldier, in the service of Herod Antipas. He's representing the hated, the despised, Roman occupation. He's actually the leader of everything they hate. He's the leader of the Gerasenes stationed at Capernaum. He's there to uphold law and order, yes. He's there to keep the peace, yes. But it's all for the greater purpose of securing Herod's tax revenues, which are Rome's tax revenues.

All the money syphoned out of Galilee eventually lands in Rome's pockets, and that just funds the very occupation, the very thing they hate. These Jewish elders, this landed nobility, and as Galilean elders, very likely belonging to the Pharisee party, they're fastidious about Jewish national identity, holding fast to the traditions of their fathers. They're not only willing to set that aside for this case, but they do so eagerly. They're persistently advocating for the centurion's cause. Why would they do that?

It all comes back to the powerful, irrefutable testimony of love. That's what Jesus commanded in the Sermon on the Mount. The centurion loved people and it was a true love, a sacrificial love, a generous love, a love that can't be denied, a love that is not found on earth, but only comes from heaven and he loved the nation as a whole. He loved these people in particular. The testimony of the elders is, that this synagogue he himself has built for us. That's their testimony, not his. That is, using his own personal funds; paying for the whole project.

The centurion, and the centurion alone was responsible for the building of the synagogue that they all attended; where their families were raised, instructed in the word of God, where their community met, where they rejoiced in Jewish tradition, in the tradition of their fathers, where they perpetuated Jewish religion, Jewish culture, and the Scriptures, and the centurion made it all happen.

The centurion's patronage is generous, and sacrificial, and kind. Where did that kind of love come from? It had to be through exposure to the scriptures, which is why building a

synagogue, in particular, is important. It's just not building a roadway. It's not building a public bathhouse. It's not building a, even as good as a house of prayer. It's a synagogue.

This man wanted to know the God of Israel. He had, come to, become a God-fearing Gentile and since the synagogue is where the Torah was read, it's where the prophets were expounded, he funded it. He wanted to see it built for the sake of and the good of the whole town. Where did that interest in scripture come from? Did he generate it all on his own? No. How did this appetite for God's word develop? Where was the seed planted?

How was the Bible being illuminated to him? Well, by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. As J.C. Ryle put it, "There's only one way to account for the centurion's character. The character was what he was by the grace of God. The Spirit had opened the eyes of this understanding and put a new heart within him." That's exactly right, and that's exactly what's happened to all of us.

That's why we have an interest in God's word. That's why we love it. That's why we want to hear it taught and expounded and explained to us. That's why we love it and want to obey it. That's why we want to put it into practice in our lives. That's why we want, we want to get everything else in our life out of the way, so we can understand and know this, that we might obey it, that we might be pleasing to him because his wisdom is precious to us. That all comes by the regenerating power of the Spirit.

And so, it says, the beginning or verse 6, "Jesus went with them." He went with them. Why wouldn't he? I'd imagine he was intrigued. He did give priority to, his, in his messianic mission to the Jewish nation, and yet there was no racial prejudice in Jesus. Here you see that clearly portrayed. He's eager to grant the centurion his request. Not only for his own sake, for the centurion's sake, but out of concern for this sick and dying slave. Such kindness on behalf of the Lord.

Here's where we come to a rather curious turn, though, in the narrative. I want to draw your attention to it in the fourth

point in your outline: The Believing Supplication. The Believing Supplication. It says in verse, verses 6 and 7, "When he was not far," when Jesus 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.'"

Interesting. The Jews said, "He is worthy"; he says of himself, "I am not worthy." Quite the contrast in perspective, wouldn't you say? And now we begin to see, in addition to his remarkable kindness, in addition to remarkable love, we start to see a remarkable humility. Humility. "Lord, don't trouble yourself." Don't trouble yourself, I'm not worthy. "I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you." He says in verse 7.

Look, that's how, right there, that's how believers pray. This is how believers come before God. This is how Christians entreat God. Right? They enter into God's presence in humility. They recognize who they are in light of who God is. We'll come back to that thought in just a moment.

But first, let's talk about this, this delegation, the second delegation. Why would the centurion send the delegation, in verse 3, asking Jesus to come and heal his servant, and then when Jesus comes, has almost arrived at his house, he sends a second delegation of his friends saying, "Lord, don't trouble yourself." Don't come.

How does that make sense? The word for, trouble, there means to harass or to weary someone, to bother them, annoy them. Literally, the word meant to flay, like as to skin something. We have the figurative expression, to get under someone's skin; that's this similar idea. Now, if anything is annoying, it is to invite somebody to come, wait until he gets almost there, and then just before he arrives at your house, suddenly retract the invitation. That is annoying.

So why the change of mind? What explains what seems so apparently to be double mindedness on the part of the centurion. To put it simply, the fact that Jesus came to him and apparently didn't intend just to stand outside his gate, but to come right into his house, under his roof, through his doorstep. This

created a pretty significant tension for this pious centurion; a man who is remarkably sensitive to Jewish sensibilities. The whole thing speaks volumes about this man's humility, about his true self estimation.

The centurion sent the first delegation of Jewish elders because, as it says in verse 7, he felt himself unworthy to visit Jesus. "I did not presume to come to you." As a Gentile, he knew where he stood. He believed he had no right on his own to come to Jesus. He had no expectation of access. There is a dividing wall, a huge one, between Jews and Gentiles. In fact, there is a sign for all Gentiles who had come near to the temple in Jerusalem, a sign that says, "Let any Gentile know he comes through here at the pain of death."

There's a wall separating Jew and Gentile so he knows where he stands. He's, he doesn't expect to get access to Jesus, Israel's messiah. And so, he sends a delegation to convey that request, his request, his original request, and what may have appeared at first glance, on his part, to be aloofness or rudeness, perhaps even pride, arrogance, to send Jewish elders

to do his bidding, the centurion wants Jesus to understand: Look, I didn't come personally because I didn't count myself worthy to come to you. I didn't think you would come. Jesus is. He's willing to come. He's willing.

Look, just pause for a moment and think about that. Many of us aren't as noble as a Roman centurion. Do we have any more of an expectation that the living God should draw near to us on our own merits because of something inherently good in us? Isn't this a comfort to you, that this amazing God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, would be willing to come to us, unworthy sinners that we are.

Here Jesus completely ignores Jewish sensibilities, Jewish traditions, cultural taboos, all that forbade Jews to enter into the home of a Gentile. After all, those Gentiles, they did awful things like eat pork, have barbecues that are not kosher. They probably didn't even rub down the meat with, with salt like they did to kosher everything. Who knows. Especially a centurion, probably comes into contact with dead bodies all the time. He's

unclean. Can't enter in there. Stay at a distance. Jesus doesn't mind.

Remember when he touched an unclean leper? For whom any other person, you touch a leper, makes you unclean. Jesus reached out his hand and touched him. Why? Because the power of Jesus' holiness is more powerful than the uncleanness of the leper. More powerful than the uncleanness of you and me, too.

So, Jesus, not only is willing to cross the threshold, he's willing to cross the city. Come to the centurion's house, and now the centurion has a real problem on his hands. He's not concerned about Jesus' ritual or ceremonial impurity; he's concerned about his own unworthiness. The Jewish delegation tried to persuade Jesus, "He's is worthy." That is not what he thinks, verse 6, "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof."

The centurion came from a, a pagan background, raised in all the filth of a pagan society. We understand that. He'd served many, many years as a soldier. No doubt he had said and

done things that he was ashamed of. His thought life had been polluted. He was haunted by things that he could still remember and so this holy one approaching his door creates a contrast for him, a stark contrast that he sensed, between the holiness of Jesus and his own unholiness, his own unworthiness.

No wonder he sent a second delegation of friends, of course he would. This man had to feel like Isaiah in the presence of God, "Woe is me! For I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips, I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." And the centurion adds, not just my lips, but my hands, and my feet, and my eyes, and my mind, everything about me is unworthy. The centurion is mortified to think that Jesus himself, the one he's rightly identified here as Lord, would cross his threshold, would come underneath his roof, when he himself is so unworthy, and it just caused him to tremble.

So, he sent the second delegation lest Jesus, the Lord, come into the presence of this unworthy sinner. Again, just pause there for a moment to reflect. Do you think of yourself that way, as unworthy? As we read earlier in Psalm 130:3, "If

you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?"

There's a healthy sense of humility in that attitude, which causes us to feel meek, not entitled, not deserving, not to make demands.

When we sense our unworthiness, we bow in humble gratitude. It's not groveling. It's not licking the dust. It's just a healthy sense of the fear of the Lord, which recognizes that what we can easily lose sight of; we have been rescued by Christ from divine judgment. We've been delivered from condemnation, which we thoroughly deserve.

What's seen and known by others on the outside, oh, that isn't even the half of it. What is known by us in our minds, oh, that isn't even the half of it. It goes deep; the depravity goes deep. We're rightly condemned. We're rightly deserving of divine judgment, and yet we've escaped wrath. We've escaped eternal punishment, due for our own sins.

That's the attitude of the centurion: humility. Another mark of believing. Supplication modeled by this centurion is

that in spite of our unworthiness, we still seek Jesus anyway. As, then, Peter had once voiced for the rest of the apostles, "Lord, You have the words of eternal life, where shall we go?" The end of verse 7, but, strong contrast there. You might read it this way, "But" or in spite of my unworthiness, look just "say the word, let my servant be healed."

It doesn't come across as much in the English translations, but now that we've explained the apparent reversal of invitation, centurion returns to his original request, and he says, "But say the word and let my servant be healed." In the original, it's, it's clear. It sounds like military language, almost. Just, just give the order, sir, and it'll happen; my child will be healed. As if to say: No doubt in my mind. You just say the word, it's gonna be done.

So, he's rightly humble, and yet at the same time, what seems like a contrast, but really isn't for any believer, he's also very enthusiastic. He truly believes. And the reason for his confidence, it's there in verse 8. That verse there shows the depth of his understanding.

Instructed by faith, of who Jesus really is, of how Jesus can truly accomplish this work of healing and, get this, without being present, without being physically there. Verse 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.'"

The centurion there is arguing from the lesser to the greater, from himself to Christ. He operates every day on the premise that he himself has been assigned a certain rank. He possesses a certain degree of authority. He's placed there by people greater than him, in a chain of command.

So if he, just a lowly centurion in the cosmic chain of command, if he can issue commands and expect them to be obeyed, knowing that they are obeyed, how much more Jesus? He who has power over disease, over demons, over life and death itself. He has the authority and the prerogative to command them all. And he can issue commands for those who come to him in faith, if he wants to.

He can command from near or far, because his authority obviously transcends distances. It crosses all boundaries. It overcomes all obstacles, and the question is: Is it his will to grant my request? Is it his will? Jesus had done it before; healed the nobleman's son, John 4:50, Jesus said, "Go, your son will live." And that boy was healed at that very moment. All it took was a word. Done. So, if happened then, why not now? That's his reasoning.

And that is the reasoning of all Christians who come to God in prayer. We come to a sovereign God. One who has authority and command of all things, one who does his will and, com, accomplishes all his good pleasure. And that is why we can come to him and pray. Because if you don't believe God is absolutely sovereign, why pray to him? Why ask him for anything, if he's not absolutely sovereign. If he can't command disease and death. If he can't command demons. If he can't take care of things, like petty things, like finances, things we all struggle with, right? Things we're anxious over.

If God isn't absolutely sovereign, doesn't have the power over your checkbook, doesn't have the power over your bank account, doesn't have the power over your health, doesn't have the power, of, over your relationships, why pray? We believe he's sovereign. We believe he is all powerful. We believe his heart, is, is always bent toward good. We believe he is all wise.

And so, when we pray. We don't pray, my will be done. No. Thy will be done, because your will is best. And if you choose to withhold this thing I ask for, it's because you're wise. You know better than I do. What am I, but a child, and an unworthy child, before you. I can't see all your goodwill. I can't see all your eternal decree. I trust you. I trust you. That's how Christians, who come to God in prayer, think. So, with the believing supplication, it got Jesus' attention. He's willing. He comes. He wants to do. He wants to heal. And it becomes for him a providentially timed teaching opportunity.

So that's point five in your outline: the perfect illustration. Teachers are always looking for good

illustrations. Here's one. Jesus notes it, spots it, verse 9, "When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, turning to the crowd that followed him, said," It's funny; he's not in a hurry. He's like, 'Oh! Oh! The servant's dying. Let me get there post haste! I need to run. No. He turns like he's got all the time in the world. Why? Because he created time and he does.

So "He marvels at him, and turns to the crowd that follows him, said, 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.'" Again, this word, marvel, *thaumazo*; used 53 times in the New Testament, only twice to show Jesus' marveling. And in both instances, when Jesus marvels, they involve this divinely generated virtue of faith.

He marvels here at the presence of extraordinary faith, and he marvels, in Mark 6:6, at the lack of faith in his hometown of Nazareth. Even just the smallest smidgeon of faith he doesn't find in Nazareth, where you might expect it most. Jesus does find faith in Israel, here and there, but not this kind of faith in Israel; even among his own disciples, he didn't find this kind of faith.

There are a number of times he had to correct his disciples because, remember, they lacked faith. He calmed the storm. I mean he commanded the wind and the waves, and they obeyed him, and the, the, howling wind, the rising waves, they came, they became flat as glass; Matthew 8:26, "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" Peter walking on the water; he started to sink beneath the waves. He took his eyes off Christ, who commanded him to come walk on the waves.

Matthew 14:31, Jesus, when he's sinking, took hold of Peter's hand and said, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Why did you doubt? It's gentle, but it is a correction. It's kind and tender, but it is a rebuke. The disciples asked Jesus why they couldn't cast a demon out of a little child.

And he said, Matthew 17:20, he said, "Because of your little faith." He's not saying, Oh, no, no, there, there, that's okay. He's saying, no, you, you who have been with me, why do you doubt? You who know me, why do you doubt? This postmodern tendency to say; Oh, let's celebrate the doubt; let's celebrate

the ambiguity of God; he changes all the time, we don't know.
That is not worthy of commendation.

But that's not what he sees in this centurion. It's not what he would later see in the Syrophenician woman. Remember Matthew 15? Matthew 15, where that woman comes to him. Her daughter is being tormented, then he kinda ignores her, at first. Keeps walking. She keeps on calling out. Keeps on crying out. His disciples come and, inter, intercede for her, saying, Please, please, attend to this woman.

And he turns to the woman and he says, he's just talking about Messianic priority, and he's drawing out of her something that the disciples need to see and he says, "It's not right to take the children's bread", that is, the food, the meat that is meant for Israel, "and to throw it to the dogs." He's not being insulting. He's saying little dogs, lapdogs, you know, like cute, cuddly like little, I've got one of these little white fluffy ones at my house. It barks too much, but it is cute and cuddly. But it's that kind of a dog. One you would have for a pet.

It's not right to take the children's meal, that's just prepared, off of the stove and not give it to the children, but to throw it down to the house dogs. And so "She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.'" Her daughter is healed instantly. She accepts that she's separate. She accepts that she's running around the house like a little house dog. That's okay for her. She gets to feed at the master's table, because even scraps are better than anything that the world has to offer.

So, Jesus found that faith and when he found that faith and he especially, he found it among the Gentiles, he's astonished. Verse 9, he spins around on his heels. He takes advantage of this divinely appointed, providentially timed teaching moment. And he says to the crowd, "I tell you" or I say to you. He's demanding, here, their full and undivided attention, "I tell you", in, "not even in Israel have I found such faith."

So, what did Jesus, found, here? What about the centurion's faith, caused Jesus to marvel. What commends this man's faith to us; makes it so exemplary? Just list a few observations I'll go through them, point, you might want to write these down for your own reflection. First, as we said, this man was a, mm, this man was a man of love. He's marked by kindness and generosity. So he's a man of love, marked by kindness and generosity.

The centurion loved his suffering slave, a man he counted as dear to him, whom he considered close and he called, my child. And the centurion also loved the Jewish nation, not because he loved their food and their culture and all of their traditions, because he loved their God. His attitude reminds me of what Ruth told Naomi, "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God shall be my God." He loved the Jewish people in that way. He built them a synagogue, at his own expense, remarkable love.

Second point, he was a man of truth marked by an interest in scripture and in Christ, the Lord of truth. Second, he's a man of truth, he's marked by an interest in scripture, in

Christ, the Lord of truth. And you should see a connection between those two points, from a man of love to a man of truth because there is a direct link between them. Where you find truth, true truth, rightly received, deeply believed, you also find true love and vice versa.

There is no true love without deep understanding of truth of God's word. If you're shallow in your understanding of Scripture, you'll be shallow in your love. If you're deep in your understanding of Scripture, you'll be deep and wise in your love. The centurion's love for the Jews is manifest in his investment. What would be best and most likely to bring them to the truth. So, he gave the Jewish nation a, a, synagogue. And then, then, because he loved his suffering servant, he sought the truth in Christ. He sought him.

He viewed Jesus as Lord. That's not merely a title of respect, by the way. Some commentators say this, this title, Lord, was a Gentile version of Rabbi, like with the Syro, Syrophoenician woman. That's not true. She identified him as Lord, messiah, son of David. There was a, there was a

theological instruction to her use of the term Lord, and I believe it is the same thing with this centurion, he understands who he is talking to. He isn't just some teacher.

Third thing, this man is a man of humility marked by meekness. A man of humility marked by meekness, number three. In contrast to the praise heaped upon him by the Jewish elders, their affirmation of his worthiness, the centurion saw himself as inherently unworthy, as deserving nothing, but, commensurate, condemnation from God. He didn't say, look, I've got some great talents that could be useful to your nation. Do you ever see people who serve in church like that? Like you're so blessed to have them, you know, you know serving wherever; music, Sunday school, scrubbing whatever, bathrooms, or what; you're blessed to have me. You're privileged to have, you know, this so and so here.

Centurion had a lot of talents and a lot of gifts and a lot of experience. He counts them nothing, none of them as worthy. None of them. As for his standing, his self-estimation, his position as a Roman centurion, his Roman citizenship, his

authoritative position in the region, he just regards himself, simply, as one placed under authority. He's just ranked in a pecking order. He's just doing his job.

As for his spiritual standing, he regarded himself as having no legitimate claim on God's grace, no right to favor from Christ. That humility caused him to approach Jesus in meekness, demanding nothing, hoping for everything.

And that leads us to a fourth quality: He's a man of faith marked by believing initiative. Number four, he's a man of faith marked by believing initiative. He's a Gentile. He's outside the covenants. He's a stranger to the promises and though unworthy, recognizing his sinfulness before the unparalleled holiness of Jesus, he is compelled to come to him anyway, asking in faith. And in faith comes. He knows the love of Israel's God.

He knows the amazing, abundant mercy of God. He learned it in scripture there in the formative years of Israel's national identity. They are plucked from Egypt by a God who makes distinctions, and he separated them out, not because of any

goodness in them. They're just like Egyptians, but he plucked them out, set them apart, gave them his law, gave them his instruction, gave them the proclamation about himself, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." He knows him.

So, in faith, believing that, he comes. He knows the compassion of Christ. One who had healed before. One whose heart is turned and moved by those in suffering. He knows it's in the heart of Christ to heal. He simply comes seeking whether or not it's his will to heal at that moment.

You know something interesting? There's no indication in the text or anywhere that I could find that the centurion met Jesus. Never shook his hand. Never saw him in the flesh. It may have happened later on; the text doesn't tell us. It would be pure speculation. I'm not averse to speculation, but I don't see it here.

And I think that is supposed to tell us something, because the centurion, like us, at least initially here, the centurion

had to trust Christ without seeing him. That's just like us, right? He didn't need to be there. He didn't need to see with his own eyes. He didn't to hear with his own ears as Jesus issued a healing command.

The centurion is content to work through intercessory prayer or intercessory requests; two delegations. He's willing to trust in Christ. He knows he can work through unseen means to accomplish his own will according to his own good pleasure. That, by the way, is markedly different from the unbelieving people of Israel, because they were always demanding signs. John 2:18, "What sign do you show us that you do these things?" Again, in John 6:30, "What sign do you do that we may see and believe in you?" What work do you perform?

By contrast, the centurion, as J.C. Ryle put it, "He doesn't ask to see any sign or wonder. He just declares his confidence that Jesus is an Almighty Lord. He's a master and king, and things like diseases, ah! they're just obedient servants, willing, at once, to depart at Jesus' command."

Can I add a fifth quality to the centurion? Centurion is a man of love, truth, humility, faith and fifthly, he's a man of authority and submission. Authority and submission marked by leadership and obedience. He gets the principle of authority and submission, because he acts in leadership on the one hand and obedience on the other hand. In verse 8, he testifies of himself, "For I too am a man set under authority."

So being placed in a position of authority, he received commands from his superiors and obeyed them. And then being in a position of authority, he issued commands to his inferiors and expected to be obeyed. As a man in authority, he obeyed by leading, commanding obedience. As a man under authority, he trusted and he obeyed.

It's that principle of authority and submission. It's that practice of leadership and obedience. These are what helped him to understand the position, authority, and the person of Christ. Think about your own submission and obedience to Christ. Does it reflect the faith of the centurion? When he says, Go, do you go?

When he says, Come, do you come? When he commands you, his slave, do this, do you do what he says?

Just quickly a final point. This is, point number six, larger point. Point number six in our outline. Cause we need to see how these things end. Right? We, we, already know, but look at point number six, your outline: The Immediate Resolution. Verse 10, "When those who had been sent returned to the house." Who's that? That's the friends. When they "returned to the house, they found the servant well."

In Matthew 8:13 we read that, "The servant was healed at that very moment." Immediate resolution. It's not simply that the, ser, servant here is delivered from the troubling and the paralyzing affliction itself. Instead, Luke, the physician, notes that they found the servant not just healed from the malady, but in good health. When Jesus heals, he heals fully.

There's a little play on words in verses 9 and 10, kinda using that word, found. Jesus had found an amazing faith in the centurion, and the, reg, and the servants or the friends

returned and found the servant in good health. They found what the centurion had requested, because they delivered the request, and then they looked for an answer. And they found, what they looked for.

Are you praying that way? In faith? Or are you simply shooting doubting prayers up into the sky, like arrows you know that are never gonna hit the mark? Are you looking carefully into the promises of God's word and then letting them instruct the way you pray, and then taking aim in your prayers, and looking for the answers in your life; as if God actually intends to answer when you ask; to be found when you seek; to open when you knock.

It wasn't just the friends, though, who were looking that day. Jesus was also looking, and he found what he was looking for. The word, found, tells us he was looking for great faith. Isn't he? In fact, Jesus is eager to find that kind of faith in each one of us. He, get this, he likes to marvel at great faith. Why? Yes, he delights to see it in us. Yes, he delights to see us grow in understanding.

But you know what he delights in the most? God. And true faith, amazing faith like this faith is a work of God in heaven. It's a work of his grace. And he loves seeing God work. Is that what rejoices your heart? Let me ask you: Do you have a faith that amazes? Are you, like that centurion, demonstrating the true marks of saving faith, sanctifying faith?

Or is your faith marked by profession only? Just skin deep. Do you say you trust God, but then you, you motor through life on your own power all the time, wearing yourself out, exhausting yourself, doing it in your own way. Is your faith skin deep? Do you have faith at all? Does any of this, that we've been talking about here, mark your life?

For those of you who know you have faith, but you're like that man who said, "Oh, yes, Lord, I do believe, just come help, help my unbelief." Ashamedly, sadly, I am one of those who have little faith, but I want to grow. So, I ask, are you a person of love, marked by kindness and generosity? Because a person who



has faith growing is marked by love, and kindness, and generosity.

Are you a person of truth, marked by an interest in the love of scripture? Do you, are you devoted to Christ himself? Are you a person of humility or a person of great pride, because you know what you've done, what you've accomplished, and you look back at all your past achievements and walk around with your chest puffed out? Can you bear with an offense from somebody else? Or do you rehearse offenses, because after all, don't they know who you are? Don't they know what you've done?

Truth is, any offense that can come from other people, it's so much smaller than what we actually deserve, right? We know. God knows. Are you a person of humility? Are you marked by meekness in dealing with other people? Are you a person of faith? Are you a person of great faith, of remarkable, Christ marveling faith, marked by believing prayer, believing action, believing initiative? Look, we want to be all of that, don't we? We want to be all of that. We know we're not, so it'd be fitting

if we close the service just by asking: Want to join me in prayer?

Father, we so often are like that man who did pray, "Lord, I believe, just help my unbelief." You are a God who is infinite, and so you are infinitely capable of paying attention to every single one of our finite needs. You are near to every single one of us, if we'll just call upon you. The word isn't far from us, it's very near. It's in your mouth and in your heart. If we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be saved. If we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be sanctified for your glory.

And so we pray that you would increase our faith. That we would be a people, this church, would be a people of great faith, of amazing faith, which means we're people of love, and of truth, and of humility, and meekness. Which means we're a people that are giving, expecting nothing in return. Which means we're a people that wants to give, and sacrifice, and love others, and know each other, and know you.



So please work in us, we pray, not just for our own sakes,
not just for the sakes of those for whom we pray, but for the
sake of your name, father, for the sake of Christ and his glory,
for the sake of his saving Gospel. Amen.