

# A Centurion's Rare Faith

## Lesson 5

### Read Luke 7:1-10.

Often, it seems, Jesus was amazed at people's lack of faith. When the Lord came back to his hometown of Nazareth, "he wondered at their unbelief" (Mk. 6:6).

On another occasion, Peter, after mustering his confidence to defy the laws of gravity and walk toward his master on the water's surface, became intimidated and began to sink in the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee. Jesus issued a gentle, but firm, rebuke to his frightened disciple: "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Mt. 14:31). When our convictions waver, or our confidence wanes, would he assess our faith any differently?

It is against this backdrop of widespread deficiencies of faith that the story is told of Jesus marveling at how "great" a man's faith was.

At Capernaum, a certain centurion had a beloved slave who was ill and at the point of death. The centurion sent a delegation of Jewish elders appealing to Jesus for the boy's life. Yet, when Jesus drew near the house, the man sent friends, saying, "Lord, do not trouble yourself further, for I am not worthy for you to come under my roof; but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it" (Lk. 7:6-8).

At this point, a stunned Jesus reacted, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith" (Lk. 7:9). What exactly was it that made this man's faith so "great"?

### I. A Question of Worthiness

A. Although the Lord would be "despised and forsaken of men" (Isa. 53:3), the centurion, instead, fully recognized the greatness of Jesus.

B. In turn, he also realized his own unworthiness to entertain Jesus under his own roof.

1. In the estimation of the Jewish elders, the centurion was "worthy" of this miracle.
2. In his own eyes, the man was profoundly "unworthy."
3. Such an assessment does not come without a depth of conviction that surpasses the shallow thinking of many people.
4. Do you have a healthy respect for Jesus' greatness, in comparison with your own unworthiness?

### II. A Question of Authority

A. The centurion was "under authority" of his superiors in the Roman army, and he had soldiers "under" him.

1. When he issued a simple command, the order was as good as done.
2. Since Jesus had greater authority, should not the same principle apply?

B. If the Lord would just “say the word,” the slave would be healed instantly.

1. What trust!
2. The centurion had absolute confidence in the Lord’s power to heal.
3. Jesus’ personal presence was not needed – just his word!
4. It is significant that this man’s faith was counted as “great” because he recognized the absolute authority of Jesus’ word.

No wonder the Lord marveled, and proceeded to heal the man’s slave. Unwavering faith of this kind must certainly be rewarded. The fact that the centurion was a Gentile made his faith all the more remarkable.

How does the story end? “When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health” (Lk. 7:10).

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### Extra Notes for Teachers:

- “Faith” is not something that is either there, in full measure, or completely absent. Strong faith usually develops gradually over time. Jesus constantly upbraids his disciples for being short on faith. His intent was to *strengthen* their faith.
- Faith can be “great” (Lk. 7:9), it can be “little” (Mt. 8:26), it can “increase” (Lk. 17:5), it can cause people to “turn” (Acts 11:21), and it may or may not “save” (James 2:14).
- Faith can also regress. Christians are warned, “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God” (Heb. 3:12).
- How does strong faith come about? The word of God produces faith (Rom. 10:17). It contains...
  - Evidence to produce *conviction* (John 20:30-31)
  - Unwavering promises of Christ which build *trust* (Lk. 5:1-13)
  - Commands that call for *surrender* (Lk. 6:46)
- The centurion was a strong believer because he had *heard about* Jesus, and he had the disposition of mind to believe what he had heard.