

The Man Who Amazed Jesus, Part 2

Scripture: Luke 7:2-10

Code: 42-92

We have the opportunity now to return to our study of the gospel of Luke. Open your Bible, if you will, to the seventh chapter. Last week we began what was an abbreviated look at the opening ten verses of Luke 7, a marvelous story about Jesus healing the servant of a centurion. Our preaching time was abbreviated because we launched our Christmas season with the Master's College Collegiate Singers in such a magnificent, glorious time of music. So we want to go back and finish the story. I've titled this section, "The Man Who Amazed Jesus." Only once does Scripture record that Jesus was amazed at the spiritual character of a person. This is the only time. This account is given in Matthew 8, as well as in Luke 7.

Look at verse 9 of Luke 7. "When Jesus heard this He marveled at him." *Thaumazo*, He was amazed, He was astonished. This was the man who amazed Jesus. As we said last time, Jesus amazed everybody, but only one man amazed Jesus with his faith. Jesus was amazed at people's unbelief, according to Mark 6:6, but only here was He actually astonished at someone's faith. That He could be astonished is an indication of His true humanity, isn't it? Cause amazement and astonishment always has an element of surprise.

Let's meet this man again and tell the rest of the story, starting in verse 2, "A certain centurion's slave who was highly regarded by him was sick and about to die. And when he heard about Jesus he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave. And when they had come to Jesus, they earnestly entreated Him saying, 'He is worthy for You to grant this to him, for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue.' Now Jesus started on His way with them and when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends saying to Him, 'Lord, do not trouble Yourself further for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, for this reason I didn't even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority with soldiers under me and I say to this one to go and he goes, and to another come and he comes, and to my slave do this and he does it.' Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him and He turned and said to the multitude that was following Him, 'I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.' And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health."

Well, it's an amazing story. It's an amazing miracle. The most amazing thing is the man who amazed Jesus. Now this is one of those critical moments in the unfolding of the gospel record. This is not just a story dropped somewhere serendipitously into the text. This is not whimsy that places this here.

This is not something that could be anywhere else, it belongs here. It is critical that this story be told immediately after the sermon preached in chapter 6. The sermon, chapter 6 verses 20 to 49, is Luke's summary of the Sermon on the Mount, that great sermon, a more full account which is given in Matthew 5 to 7, but after the sermon, immediately Luke records this miracle and for very good reason.

If you look back at verse 1, you see there the connection. First of all, there is a chronological connection. This miracle happened when, or better, after He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people. It was then right after the Sermon on the Mount that this miracle occurred. That is the chronological connection.

Then there is a geographical connection. He went to Capernaum. Capernaum, very nearby, where Jesus delivered that sermon, the mount that we identify is the place where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount is just adjacent to the city of Capernaum. In fact, you could easily walk there, as Jesus and the rest of the crowd did.

And so, there is then a chronological connection that occurred immediately after the sermon. There is a geographical connection, it occurred in the place adjacent to where the sermon was preached. More importantly than that, there is a theological connection...theological connection. This man is the living model and illustration of the sermon. And that's why the spirit of God inspires Luke to put the record in this chronological sequence because this is the theological connection. You have the theology of discipleship in the sermon, now you have a living, breathing, example of discipleship. Everything that Jesus was talking about in the sermon that marked out a true believer, a true child of God, a true citizen of the Kingdom, everything that Jesus said that defines that kind of person is living in this man. It is alive in him. It is vivid in him. So this is very, very important in its connection to the detailed sermon Jesus gave.

Let's go back and meet the man. Verse 2, he was a certain centurion. Nothing more than just a certain centurion, no further designation. But we, last week, put together some of the pieces to know a little bit about a centurion, and this one in particular. Centurions were Roman soldiers who commanded essentially a hundred men, that's the connection between centurion and the word century. That was very flexible. Sometimes less, sometimes more but that was generally it. They would be equal to a captain in today's military, that is they were battle tested soldiers, they were...they were the non-commissioned officers, they were the highest ranking non-commissioned officers. They were the strong men, the courageous, the duty-bound men who had worked their way up the ranks by fighting hand-to-hand combat against the enemy. They were men's men, soldier's soldiers. This centurion, like all of them in the New Testament, were attached to Rome because Rome had conquered essentially the world, that world anyway and Roman occupation was a real situation in Israel. And so Rome had occupied Israel to the horror of the Jews who hated having a pagan, Gentile, idolatrous force in their precious promised land. They saw that as an abomination in

every sense. But here was a representative of that Roman army. Not only was he a Roman soldier, but he was under assigned authority to Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas was an Idumaeen, a non-Jew, a Middle-Eastern kind of sheik type ruler in modern terms, one of the chiefs of the Middle East who had been given a section of Galilee over which he ruled and Rome found that that was a tolerable situation so that actually this Roman soldier would have been directly answerable to Herod Antipas, another pagan, another idolater, and then indirectly and finally answerable to Rome. Everything against him in terms of being popular with the Jews.

Now the Roman soldiers were placed in the towns and cities and regions of Israel, primarily to do two things...keep the peace and collect the taxes. And so they were there as a policing presence to make sure the Roman pax, the *Pax Romana*, the Roman Peace was kept in place and to make sure taxation was carried out. Everything imaginable that could have made this man hated by the Jews was a reality. Some have even suggested that it was likely, and it's probably true, that he was not an Italian. That is to say he wasn't from Rome. As Rome conquered the world, it conscripted men from its conquered nations and placed them into the military. We don't have any idea what nation he actually came from. Some have even suggested he may well have been a Samaritan. That would have added another intolerable element to this man. Everything to cause the Jews to hate him was in place. Yet when you read the story, it's amazingly the opposite. The Jews consider him a worthy man, a man who loves their nation and who built their synagogue. He has won their favor and their affection.

This in itself is amazing and I suppose we could say this is an amazing man, if that was all there was to say about the story. We could conclude that this man had some amazing social skills. He had amazing political ability, or he had amazing wisdom to figure out how he could overcome the incredible hostility which was essential to the very nature of who he was and become one beloved by the Jews. That in itself is an amazing story, but we're not talking about how he amazed the Jews, or how he amazes us, we're talking about how he amazed Jesus. And what amazes Jesus is completely a different issue. This is a very notable story and I want to reinforce this in your mind. It has immense personal application that has massive theological application because when Jesus wants to illustrate what a true disciple looks like, He shows us a man. That's the practicality of it. If you want to get discipleship out of the abstract and into the real, you get out of chapter 6 and in to chapter 7, here it is. And furthermore, what else is so profound about this is there was no such man in Israel. And I read to you from John 1 this morning that He came unto His own and His own...what?...received Him not and His own were the Jews. And Jesus said, "I haven't found anybody in Israel with this kind of faith." When Jesus wanted an illustration of a true disciple, He had to use a Gentile, an occupying Roman soldier, a man under authority to the despised Herod Antipas, a man involved in taxation and oppression of the people of Israel. It's amazing. But this is the man.

Now if you remember the sermon, you will remember that Jesus described a true disciple in some very clear terms. A true disciple, true believer, child of God, member of the Kingdom was humble,

repentant over sin, loved even his enemies with a supernatural love, was generous, was merciful, compassionate, did good, was righteous, was devoted to the Lord and obedient. And he is the one who built his house on the rock and survives the judgment.

We also saw in that sermon how Jesus contrasted that with the Jewish religious establishment. The Jewish religious establishment were self-righteous, didn't see their sin, only saw their supposed righteousness. They loved only who ever loved them and whoever would benefit them. They were merciless. They were without compassion. They were judgmental. They were condemning. They were evil. They were unrighteous. They said, "Lord," with their mouths, but they didn't do what He said.

And so what you had in that sermon was the contrast between the Jewish establishment and their self-righteous system and a true child of God and citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. And now you need an illustration of what that looks like in human form and Jesus has to use a Roman soldier, a pagan occupying their land, collecting taxes and serving idolaters...the worst scenario possible because He cannot find this faith...Matthew says...in anyone in Israel.

Now let's look at what was amazing about this man. First of all, his great love was amazing. His great love was amazing. In verse 2 it says, "A certain centurion slave who was highly regarded by him was sick and about to die." The word "slave" there is *doulos*, it's just the generic word for slave. It can be translated slave, or servant, it doesn't say anything about the specificity of the slave or the function, it's just the very generic word. It doesn't say anything that is necessarily indicative of slavery, some distasteful, abusive environment. It's just a word that means to serve. In those days it was a slave who did that kind of service so the words are used interchangeably. And that word, by the way, *doulos*, is used a number of times when the servant is referred to in the story, but down in verse 7, I want you to look at the end of the verse, you have the statement, "My servant will be healed." My servant, here, here the word servant is different, it's not *doulos*, interestingly it's *pais*, p-a-i-s transliterated, it's the word for "boy...boy," young boy. And that indicates to us...and by the way, Matthew uses the same word to describe him in Matthew 8:6, this is a slave, a servant of this centurion who is a young boy. That was a very typical kind of situation. Young boys were assigned to these military men like an intern. They would learn about manhood. They would learn about service. These guys were heroes to them. And a young man would probably count it a great privilege to come alongside a noble soldier's soldier and learn to be a man by serving such a one. And that's how they trained men for the future in the military and for leadership.

So here was a boy servant. The fact of the matter is, however, in ancient Roman times boy slaves were also abused. There was massive pedophilia going on in the Roman Empire as there is in parts of the world today going on. So they could be terribly abused in that system. And since a slave had absolutely no rights, the master could take his life at any time without having any recourse at all, he could even kill him completely without any litigation ever being brought up. You see, slaves were

considered to be a tool with no rights. One Roman writer, Cato, recommended that farmers examine their tools every year and throw out the old and broken ones, including slaves. So once a slave was weak and once a slave was sick, and this one was so sick he was near death, they really rendered no purpose and their value was only material value, not personal value. And so the normal approach would be to just dump this young boy, replace him with somebody who could function. Aristotle even said, "There can be no friendship, nor justice toward inanimate things, indeed, not even toward a horse or an ox or a slave. Master and slave have nothing in common," end quote. They were viewed just as a tool, an instrument.

But this isn't the case here. So you're starting to see something about this man right away that's not normal. Here's one who looks at this slave who is about to die and it says, "Who was highly regarded by him," the word "highly regarded," *entimos*, means precious. And this doesn't even go with being a Roman soldier, considering some boy slave precious. What we find here immediately then is this is a level of affection for a man that is extraordinary. The boy is not an inanimate object to him, he is an object of his affection. The word *entimos* also can mean honored. It is used in chapter 14 of Luke verse 8 as describing the distinguished guest at a banquet. It is used of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:29 to refer to him as one who is held in the highest regard, with the greatest honor, very precious, very valuable. So, this very valuable young boy is sick. He's the object of concern and affection by this rough, tough soldier.

Now it tells us only that he was sick and about to die. Matthew fills in some information in the diagnosis, however. Matthew 8:6, "Lying paralyzed at home, suffering great pain." He is *paralutikos* he is a paralytic. I don't know if he's a quadriplegic or a paraplegic or perhaps it's only some temporary kind of paralysis. We have no way of...a viral thing, a brain damage issue, a nervous system problem, spinal cord. We don't know whether it was the result of an injury or an infection or whatever. But he's in a condition that his paralysis also has pain, some paralysis doesn't have pain, for obvious reasons if nerves are destroyed. He's in severe pain, suffering great pain. The agony only excites more the heart of a compassionate centurion who loved the boy and sought to help him. This indicates the first illustration of his great love. He loves in a way that is not normal, it's not the way you love, you don't love slaves in that environment.

Verse 3, the extent of his love takes him to Jesus. "And when he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave." Somebody told this man about Jesus. And I want to tell you right now, somebody told him a lot about Jesus. The reputation of Jesus had spread and information about Jesus might have come from many sources because back in chapter 4 verse 14 says, "The news about Jesus spread throughout the surrounding district," and verse 37, "The report of Him was getting out into every locality in the surrounding district." Everywhere...everywhere around at that point, Nazareth, everywhere around the Galilee area word was spreading rapidly because everywhere Jesus was going He was casting demons out of people, showing power over the spiritual world. He was healing sick people, showing power over the physical

world. And He was teaching with profundity and clarity, the likes of which no one had ever heard, showing power in the intellectual world. And He was teaching purity and sinlessness and all of that, showing power in the moral world. And nobody had ever heard anything or seen anything like this and it was literally...it was literally extensive everywhere He went. And the centurion got the word now. He got more than just the sort of superficial information about the power of Jesus to heal because it becomes clear as the story unfolds that this man knows enough about Jesus to call Him "Lord." Somewhere along the line somebody gave him the real story about Jesus. Some obscure person in the background that we may meet in heaven was a witness to this centurion.

He heard about Jesus. And Matthew says he asked Him to heal his servant. If you read Matthew 8 it says that he asked Jesus to heal his servant. Luke, always concerned about the historical detail, tells us how he asked Him. He didn't ask Him directly, verse 3, "He sent some Jewish elders asking Jesus to come and save the life of his slave." He didn't go himself to Jesus. He didn't go. The reputation of Jesus was extensive as a healer. This man believed that Jesus could heal his servant and he begs Jesus, Matthew 8:5 says, but he doesn't do it personally, he will not go personally. And you know later on it says because he felt so utterly unworthy. So he sent some Jewish elders. Now the fact that you could get some Jewish elders, they would be the *presbuteros* in the community, the community leaders, that you could get some Jewish elders to do the bidding of a Roman soldier is almost beyond belief. That in itself is amazing. But he asks the Jewish elders if they will go to Jesus and ask Jesus to come to his house and save the life of his slave.

Now normally the Jewish elders wouldn't respond to a request by a Roman soldier of the conquering army, the occupation army. But these elders are asked to be his representatives, his intercessors, his advocates, his intermediaries to go to Jesus because the soldier doesn't feel worthy. So he knows more about Jesus than that Jesus is a healer. He knows himself to be a sinner and he has received the information that Jesus is not and therefore it is that sense of shame and unworthiness that restrains him from going himself.

So, the Jews responded in verse 4. "And when they had come to Jesus they earnestly entreated Him." That is amazing as well. They don't say to this Roman, "Well, you know, we're going to go because if we don't go you're going to make it hard on us. You're going to raise our taxes or you're going to inflict some injury on us or you're going to...you're going to notch up the oppression." Not that at all. They go and they literally, it says, earnestly beg Jesus. They beg Jesus. And what do they say? They say, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him."

He's worthy? This is amazing. They consider the man worthy. All of the natural animosity is gone. And they say he is worthy for You to do what he asks You to do, we are his advocates. This is the only time I can find in the New Testament where any Jews advocate on behalf of a Roman soldier. It's amazing.

Oh, by the way, there's a good insight into their theology here, into their religion. Their whole system was about worthiness, wasn't it? "He is worthy and so we think You ought to do this for him because he's worthy." That was the Jewish system, all about merit, all about worthiness, personal worthy which therefore earned you a right to divine favor. That was the idea. They were all about that worthiness stuff. They thought that they were worthy for God to take them into His Kingdom because of their self-righteousness and their ceremonial observances. And they thought this guy was worthy also because obviously he had stepped in to Judaism. So, it was if they were saying to Jesus, "You, the servant of God, You, the prophet of God, whatever they thought about Him, You owe him this." That was their system. That was how they thought.

Why? What did he do to earn this? Why is God obligated to him? Verse 5, "For he loves our nation." He loves our nation? This is amazing. I mean, everything about this is amazing, we haven't gotten to the part yet that amazed Jesus. But he loves our nation. He's not saying he likes us...we've gotten to know this guy around town and he likes us. He's not talking about that. He's not talking about he made some friends with some Jewish people. He loves the nation.

This is amazing because, I mean, it was just basically the way it was. Jews hated Gentiles and vice-versa. The Romans called the Jews a filthy race, accused them of barbarian superstition, worshiping animals, offering human sacrifices. The Jews were referred to by the Romans as haters of humanity. I mean, there was the vicious kind of animosity between Jew and Gentile that you see in other parts of the world through human history where people continually kill each other. This man loved the nation. It wasn't that he loved a few Jews, he loved the people of God which means that he had come to understand not only the true and living God, but that he had come to understand that this was the people of the covenant of God. I don't know who it was that told him about Jesus, but he gave him some solid and complete theology.

By the way, the word "loves" is *agapao*, the highest and noblest and richest word for love in the Greek language. He loved with the highest and the best kind of love, the love of the will, the noblest love, not the love of passion and not the love of emotion, but the love of will, the love of understanding and knowledge. He loved the whole people of promise which indicates that he understood something about the place of Israel in the plan of God, that they were the chosen people.

So here is a man who against the grain of normal Roman attitude, loves his slave. And here is a man who certainly in a transcendent way loves his enemies which Jesus said was a definitive mark of a child of God. He's also marked by great generosity, not only great love. You remember Jesus said that one of the marks of a true disciple is that he will give to you when he knows he'll never get paid back. Remember that? He talked about being merciful to somebody in need, being generous. If somebody needed one of your garments, give him both of your garments. And there is that mark of a child of God that we call generosity or mercy or grace. Well this is that man. Look at this, verse 5, "It

was he who built us our synagogue."

Now this is a wealthy soldier, folks. He, emphatic, the pronoun is implied in the Greek verb by the structure of the verb and so whenever the actual pronoun is placed there like this, *autos*, it is to make it emphatic so that it reads, "It was he who built us our synagogue." Giving him sole credit for providing for them a place to worship and to be taught.

What was the synagogue for? Well they went to the synagogue and certainly they praised and worshiped God, but the primary function was teaching. They read the Scripture and then they explained the meaning of it. That's what Jesus did in the synagogues around Galilee, as we saw illustrated in the fourth chapter. And so this is a man who had a love for the truth. This is a man who became a God-fearer, who obviously rejected the polytheism of his Roman background or whatever nation he came from, whatever gods his people worshiped in favor of the true God, he accepted the true God, he accepted the people of God, the Jewish people. He accepted the instruction of the Old Testament and even took his own money and built a synagogue. Amazing, amazing, built a synagogue for the teaching of the Word of God.

It is true that the Roman encouraged religion throughout the world when Rome conquered, they encouraged religion. And the reason they encouraged religion was they knew that religion provided internal moral restraint. That is to say normally religions have a moral code that works against criminality. And so it assisted the Roman powers to have people be religious, particularly when there was a stiff moral code. So when they went in to occupy the land of Israel, they were happy for the Israelites to be very religious because they could see that there was a very, very high degree of morality in Judaism. So they were very eager for synagogues to be built and the Jewish people to carry out their religion. In fact, Augustus actually...Augustus Caesar...recommended allowing Jews to build synagogues any time they wanted, but this doesn't happen because of that kind of cynicism. Gibbon actually said, referring to Roman attitudes, "The various modes of religion which prevailed in the world were all considered by the people as equally true," kind of like today, "they were considered by the philosophers as equally false and they were considered by the leaders as equally useful."

Building the synagogue in this case is quite different. He was wealthy, he was generous, but it was more than that. This man had a great desire for the truth. He wanted to know the Word of God. That's why he built a synagogue, because that's the place where the Word of God was taught. This is a true God-fearer, like Cornelius in Acts 10:1 and 2, a Gentile who had rejected whatever his pagan religion was for the worship of the one true living God. He had adopted the Jewish people as his people. He had literally become a proselyte to Judaism. He built the synagogue where you can be certain he went to hear the Word of God. He must have had a personal interest in the exposition of the Old Testament, worship of the true and living God.

This is amazing, I'll tell you this is amazing and I'll tell you why it's amazing, because...you say, "Well he was hanging around Jewish people all the time and they had an influence." Let me tell you about the influence. Judaism in the time of Jesus wasn't a good witness. It didn't attract people to God. In fact, in Romans 2:24 Paul said, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." Remember that? He was indicting the Jews and saying, "Your form of Judaism is blasphemous and the God of...the true and living God, our God, is blasphemed because of you." And you remember in Matthew 23 that when Jesus was condemning the Pharisees, the Jewish leaders, He said in verse 13, "You shut off the Kingdom of heaven from men." Wow...you're the opposite of evangelists, you're the opposite of witnesses, you shut the Kingdom to men. Why? Because you created a false religion. You shut the Kingdom. You let them into your lies, your false system. Down in verse 15 He said, "You travel land and sea to make one proselyte and when he becomes one, he's twice as much a son of hell as you are." Literally, your evangelism sends people to hell. It's false.

Well, the same as gone on throughout history. Judaism, people...Jewish people aggressively trying to get people to convert, they're making them sons of hell because the religion is false. So how did this centurion somehow get through that blasphemous, false stuff to the truth? But he did. Somebody told him the truth about Christ cause faith can't come without the truth and the Spirit of God opened his heart, he became a believer in the true God, became a believer in the Word of God, built the synagogue where regularly throughout the week the Word of God was read and explained.

What you see in this man is great love, not the normal kind, indicating God's work in his heart, the transformation, new birth, if you will. What you see in this man is great generosity, characteristic of one who has the compassion and mercy of God. What you see in this man is great devotion to God and to the truth of God, as indicated by his connection with the synagogue. And then what you see in this man is great humility...great humility.

Remember what the Sermon on the Mount begins with? Blessed are the poor, and meek, and the mourning, and the hungry. That's all talking about humility. The Jews were the proud and the rich and the smug and the laughing. But people in the Kingdom saw their spiritual bankruptcy. This is the case of this man. Verse 6, Matthew tells us that Jesus...Matthew 8:7 says Jesus said, "I will come and heal him." The Jewish elders got to Jesus and Jesus said, "Okay, I'll come and heal him." So He starts on the way. Verse 6, "Jesus started on His way with them," the elders are going to take Him to the house. "And when He was not already...when He was not already far from the house..." They're approaching the house, there's a crowd following Jesus, numbers in the thousands, so here they go through Capernaum, this huge crowd, kicking up dust, loud, noisy, you know, going through the streets. It's pretty clear they're coming. "And when they're already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends." He senses that they're coming, he sends friends, says, "Tell Him this, 'Lord, do not trouble Yourself further for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof.'"

The Jews said, "You've got to do it, You've got to do it. He is worthy, he is worthy, he is worthy." That was the typical self-righteous approach. His attitude was, "I'm not worthy, I'm not worthy, I'm not worthy." Contrast is clear. You know, he started out with this idea that I...verse 7, "For this reason I didn't even consider myself worthy to come to You, I didn't even want to come to You because I didn't want to...I didn't want to bring my sinful self into Your holy presence. I didn't want to come." But he did say, "I'm asking You to come," but as he thought about Jesus coming to him, it was going to end up in the same confrontation. And the more he thought about Jesus showing up at his house, the more difficult it was to swallow that and his sense of shame become more acute all the time. He finally says, "You've got to stop where You are, You can't dare come into this house. You just can't come here. I'm not worthy."

Do you see the contrast here? I mean, the system says, "You're worthy, you're worthy, you're worthy." The man says, "I'm not worthy." This is true repentance, true humility. Self-righteous pride was the backbone of Judaism. But true humility marked a son of God, a child of God. Close enough, You can't come any closer. This is like Peter saying, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am...what?...a sinful man," Luke 5:8. This is like the publican putting his head down in Luke 18, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner," and he won't even lift his eyes and look toward heaven he's so ashamed.

He asks Jesus to come through Jewish elders. Now he asks Jesus not to come through his friends. His first emotional request, "Tell Jesus to come," has been replaced by increasing conviction of his own complete unworthiness, he's too ashamed of himself. And so he says to Jesus, and this is such a straightforward statement, he says to Jesus, "Do not trouble Yourself...do not trouble Yourself." It's the...it's the Greek word *skullo*, it means to be extremely annoyed, extremely agitated. He says, "Don't dare come near me, I will be an extreme agitation to Your holiness." He doesn't yet understand fully "mercy." He doesn't yet understand fully "grace." But he does understand sin and he does understand penitence. And he didn't get it from the Jewish elders. I don't know who it was, when I get to heaven one of the people I want to find is whoever witnessed to this guy.

Now some have suggested he didn't want Jesus to come into his house because he knew Jewish prohibition because they had a prohibition about ever going into a Gentile house. You can read about that in Acts 10, Acts 11. That wasn't it. This is not some kind of ceremonial issue with him. This is personal. There was just an overwhelming sense of shame. He was a true penitent. He was truly a broken and a contrite heart whom the Lord will not despise. He had a beatitude attitude. And so in verse 7 he says, "For this reason I didn't even consider myself worthy to come to You in the first place, and now I certainly don't consider myself worthy to have You come to me, so just say the word and my servant will be healed." And now we're starting to see his great faith. This is the very faith that I think caused God to regenerate this man. "Just say the word..."

In Matthew 8:8, Matthew records that he said, "I'm not worthy for You to come under my roof. You don't even want to come near where I am." But he says, "Just say the word..." This is his great faith.

Great love, great generosity, great devotion to God and to the truth of God and the people of God, great humility and repentance, and here is great faith. Absolutely confident. "Jesus, all You have to do is speak it and it will be so." He understands that Jesus is divine power personified. He understands that the words of Jesus are utterly authoritative and omnipotent. No magic, no chicanery, no trickery, no manipulation, no sleight of hand. "You don't have to come and fiddle around with people and knock them over and all of that, just speak...just speak." And what he is saying is, "I understand Your divine authority. I understand that You rule in the world. You rule in the physical realm. You rule in the realm of life and death and You have absolute authority over that." That's what he's saying, "Speak and it will be so. Just say the word, my servant will be healed."

This is an affirmation. And by the way, back to verse 6, he said, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself." He acknowledges Jesus as sovereign, omnipotent, authoritative Lord. And again I say, whoever got to him, got him the whole message and he believed it. He said, "I understand sovereignty, I understand authority," and he reasons from the lesser to the greater. Look at verse 8, "I understand it, I too am a man under authority." This is the message he's given to his friends to give to Jesus. Tell Him, "I'm a man under authority with soldiers under me. I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes, and another, 'Come,' and he comes. And my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it." He's saying, "I understand in my simple, humble, little, low life I understand what it means to be in charge and have the power and the authority and the sovereignty and the right, I understand that, I understand what it means to speak and it happens. I do that all the time in my little world, therefore I understand the authority that You have over the whole realm of life and death." Wow. I understand that. This is monumental. He is saying, "You have authority over life and You have authority over death." He's saying, "You are God. You are Lord. Just speak and it will be done."

Ah, this is amazing. Amazing love, amazing generosity and mercy to enemies, amazing devotion to the true God and the Word of God and the people of God, amazing humility, amazing penitence, none of it was demonstrated to him by that whole Jewish establishment, they were the opposite of all of this. Finally, amazing faith and sovereign authority of the Lord Himself.

Verse 9, "When Jesus heard this, He was amazed at him, He marveled at him, He was astonished, if you will, and He turned and He said to the multitude," they're always there, they were following Him. He said this, "I say to you, not even in Israel," and Matthew says He said, "No one in Israel." "Not even in Israel have I ever found anyone with such great faith."

Boy, that is a sad indictment. What was wrong with Israel? They were so steeped in their self-righteousness. There was no model that He could use among them. It had to be, of all unimaginable things, a Gentile and a Roman and a soldier. And He told the crowd, "I don't see this with any of you, I don't see this with any of you." That sad indictment spelled the end of Capernaum, by the way. Chapter 10 of Luke's gospel, verse 15, "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you?"

You will be brought down to Hades." That city and that synagogue which, by the way, Jesus probably preached in later, built by the centurion as He preached in Capernaum, probably preached in that synagogue but later it was all destroyed. If you go to Capernaum now, as I have, many times, you can go to the synagogue, you can be there and the ruins of what is there were probably built right on top of the ruins of the synagogue that was built by the centurion. But there's nothing else there, obliterated by the judgment of God. And, in fact, Israel still exists in tragic unbelief even as a nation, even today, with just a small remnant through history believing in their Messiah. The Lord didn't find in Israel this kind of faith. And, of course, Israel eventually said they didn't want Jesus as their Messiah and they got the Romans to kill Him. And then the church was born and all the world was drawn in to become the people of God, to take over for a witness nation that failed in its responsibility. But there was always a remnant and one among that remnant, perhaps like an Anna or a Simeon, had gotten a hold of this Roman soldier and given him the truth.

So sad. Israel, Paul says, they have the promises and they have the adoption and they have the covenants and they have the Scripture and they have everything and they have a righteousness that is not a saving righteousness. He said, "I can almost wish myself accursed for the sake of Israel, my people."

Well, the words of Jesus in verse 9, that's not all He said. Matthew tells us He said something else. In Matthew's account, chapter 8, just listen to this. This is what the full statement was. He starts out saying, "I haven't found such great faith with anyone in Israel." Then Jesus said this, listen to this, "And I say to you," as He speaks to the crowd, "that many shall come from east and west." What's that? East of Israel, west of Israel, Gentiles. "Many will come from the whole Gentile world and they will recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven." Heaven is going to be filled with Gentiles.

But...verse 12, "The sons of the Kingdom," that's the Jews, the ones to whom the Kingdom was promised through Abraham and David, "The sons of the Kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness in the place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." Wow. So the Kingdom of Heaven is going to be populated with Gentiles. The Jews cast into hell. Jesus then said to the centurion, Matthew 8:13, "Go your way, let it be done to you as you have believed." Jesus was saying, "I give you what you ask for because of your faith." Back to Luke, Luke says verse 10, "When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health." He had been healed.

So you start to see the picture forming here. Jesus can't find one illustration of a true disciple in Israel. This begins to fix in concrete the direction of Israel's resolute, unbending unbelief and hostility toward Christ. And so there's a sadness to this as well as a marvelous and joyous picture of a true believer. The man who amazed Jesus.

I asked you last week, and I pose the question again. I've thought about it a lot. Wouldn't I like to be a man who amazed Jesus, whose love, whose generosity, whose mercy, whose devotion, whose love of the truth, whose love of the people of God, whose love of God, whose humility, whose penitence and whose great faith and whose submission to the power and authority of Christ would amaze Him. You don't want to settle for anything less.

Our Father, it is to Your glory and Your glory alone that such faith exists. It is a mighty work You do and yet it is with...not without a willing heart. We're so thrilled to meet this soldier. Wonder what his name is. Wonder who talked to him. Thank You for doing a mighty work in His heart. Thank You for showing everybody that the gospel was not limited to the Jewish people. In fact, though it was to them first, they rejected it except for that small remnant. Thank You, Lord, for the salvation offered to all of us from the east and the west who will one day sit with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the rest in the Kingdom of Heaven. In the meantime, we would want to be those kinds of Christian men and women who amaze You. We certainly ask that You wold work that in our hearts, in Christ's name. Amen.

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