

Unit II: The Measure of Faith Healed from a Distance

DEVOTIONAL READING: Zechariah 8:18-23

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Luke 7:1-10

PRINT PASSAGE: Luke 7:1-10

KEY VERSE

Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. (Luke 7:7, KJV)

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“That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.” (Luke 7:7, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Discover the factors that influenced the centurion’s faith in Christ to heal the servant.
- Confess your need for God in the face of feeling helpless or hopeless.
- Engage in a pattern of fervent prayer amid helpless and hopeless circumstances.

*Key Terms

Centurion (verse 6)—Greek: *hekatontarchés* (hek-at-on-tar’-khace): a captain of one hundred men.

Was amazed (verse 9)—Greek: *thaumazó* (thou-mad’-zo): wondered at; admired; “marvelled” (KJV).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

God’s Word speaks repeatedly about compassion. The Hebrew and Greek words translated “compassion” in the Bible mean “to have mercy, sympathy, or pity for another.” The Bible teaches that God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and flourishing in love and great faithfulness. God’s compassion for sinful humanity moved Him to send His only Son, Jesus Christ, as the embodiment of all His divine virtues, including His compassion. The Gospels are filled with stories of Jesus’ compassion toward others. Compassion caused Him to weep for His grieving friends at Lazarus’s grave. Multitudes came and were healed because of His compassion for them. Compassion fueled His teaching to the crowds that followed Him, the things their religious leaders abandoned and failed to teach. Although each of the Gospels presents examples of Christ’s compassion, Luke focuses on Jesus’ compassionate nature as both the Son of Man and Son of God. As the Son of Man, Jesus showed concern for those who could not raise themselves above the social and cultural stigmas of the day. While the elitist religious hierarchy deliberately ignored them, Jesus, the Son of Man



The Biblical Context

Although his name is not mentioned, Luke, a Gentile physician and traveling companion of Paul's, is universally credited as the author of this gospel book and the book of Acts. The only known Gentile author of any New Testament writing, Luke's primary audience was Gentile. The text emphasizes God's plan for all people. Luke wrote to Theophilus, most likely an early Christian who supported his work. Luke wrote meticulously based on eyewitness accounts affirming Jesus' divinity. However, the book's recurring theme is Jesus' identity as both the Son of God and the Son of Man. Luke stressed Jesus' relationship with people, especially those considered to be society's outcasts: women, children, Gentiles, tax collectors, and sinners by Jewish cultural standards. Luke provides instances of those considered outcasts' receiving Jesus' compassionate help for demonstrating faith in Him and His ministry. One of these "outcasts" was a Roman centurion seeking healing for a beloved servant (see Luke 7:1-10).

was drawn to them, met their physical and spiritual needs, and set the standard for others to follow His example. Jesus' compassion magnetically drew people to faith in God, especially in circumstances where personal problems or setbacks might have otherwise blocked them from moving forward. When we commit to compassionate, faithful living, we can influence others to turn to God and experience deliverance and comfort in their seasons of need.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Faith's Request (*Luke 7:1-5*)

KJV

NOW WHEN he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.

2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

3 And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.

4 And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this:

5 For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

NIV

WHEN JESUS had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum.

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

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

4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, 5 "because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

Luke 7 continues the book's pattern of describing Jesus' Galilean ministry events with calls to faithfulness. This chapter presents six events which describe reactions to Jesus and His ministry. Jesus entered Capernaum, His adopted hometown (**verse 1**), and received word that a Roman centurion stationed there had a critically ill servant who was near death (**verse 2**). Unlike many slave masters, this centurion had compassion for his servant. Hearing that Jesus was in town, the centurion sent some Jewish elders to Him, requesting that Jesus would come and heal his servant (**verse 3**). The centurion's request suggests that he had a measure of faith in Jesus, not as a last resort or magic charm, but because he believed He was from God. When the elders arrived, they earnestly pleaded for Jesus to come on the centurion's behalf. They explained that the centurion had demonstrated his love for the Jewish people in Capernaum and proved it by building them a synagogue (**verses 4-5**). Interestingly, the centurion sent for Jesus because of what he had heard. While Luke does not specify what the centurion heard, he must have heard about the compassionate healings that Jesus

performed. It is unknown whether the centurion worshipped God as a “God-fearer” without becoming a Jewish proselyte, but his association with the Jews and knowledge of Jesus’ ministry were enough to impact his faith in Jesus. Believers may fail to realize the importance of visibly demonstrating faith and compassion toward others, especially in the presence of unbelievers. Just as the centurion’s faith drove his benevolent action toward the Jews and his servant, we, too, must commit to expressing faith with actions over words.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why is it necessary for believers to express their faith with actions?

Faith’s Reward (Luke 7:6-10)

KJV

6 Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:

7 Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.

8 For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

10 And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.

NIV

6 So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.

7 “That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.

8 “For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.”

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

Jesus responded to the centurion’s request by accompanying the elders back to the centurion’s home. On the way, the centurion sent friends to stop Jesus because he didn’t feel worthy to have Jesus in his home (verse 6). The centurion’s humility was unusual for a Roman in his military rank and position. It was the direct opposite of the common Roman attitude and treatment of Jewish subjects at that time. The centurion also expressed his unworthiness by showing hospitality to a Jewish rabbi he believed to be holy, revealing his belief that it was unnecessary for Jesus to be physically present to heal his servant. Jesus only needed to say the word, and his servant would be healed (verse 7). To explain his reasoning, the centurion gave examples of his authority (verse 8). The entire incident demonstrates the centurion’s authority over the elders and individuals who followed him. The centurion rightly concluded that everything under Jesus’ authority

must submit to Him, just as soldiers under a centurion's authority obeyed him. He was correct. Jesus often demonstrated His authority over sickness, disease, and demonic spirits, delivering many. If the centurion could command actions in his absence, he reasoned, then, that Jesus could certainly perform a healing miracle with a simple verbal command—that is, without being physically present. Jesus did not hide His amazement at the centurion's expression of great faith (**verse 9**). Turning to those present, Jesus said that He hadn't ever seen such faith, even among God's people, the Jews. The Jews enjoyed God's favor for centuries; they received instruction about the Messiah's coming but refused to believe what the prophets foretold. Now, a Gentile who likely knew nothing of the Hebrew Scriptures had expressed such commendable faith in the Messiah who was rejected. Jesus spoke the word and the text indicates that the servant was instantly healed (**verse 10**). Those sent to intercept Jesus returned to the centurion's home and found his servant completely recovered from his illness.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does such impressive faith from someone outside the “community of faith” challenge believers who seem almost incapable of believing God for the impossible?

A Closing Thought

This story of the centurion's faith is yet another example of Jesus' willingness and ability to do great and mighty things for those who turn to Him in faith. Every answered prayer is more evidence that our omnipresent Lord can heal and deliver from a distance. This lesson challenges believers to back up whatever they claim to believe about God with genuine acts of faith. When the enormity of our problems threatens to impede spiritual progress, our initial response should be to turn to God with “great” faith. This level of faith is possible only to those who are becoming more like Him through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Your Life

Where do you turn when problems arise in your life? Most believers would automatically say “to God,” but often they only turn to God as a last resort—when every other option has failed. This week, nurture your spiritual relationship with God by spending more time in the Word and prayer. God's compassion is unchanging, but we experience Him more fully as we learn to enter His presence and give Him our cares and burdens.

Your World!

The centurion learned that Jesus could really heal even from a distance. Do not miss the fact, however, that the healing miracle happened only when the centurion approached Jesus for help in a spirit of humility and concern for another. As we turn to God, trusting Him to help us handle our problems, let us also approach Him with a contrite heart and a compassionate concern for those who are struggling with their own burdens.

Closing Prayer

Gracious Father, by faith we confess our need for You, especially when we feel helpless. Thank You for being the ever-present help we need. Help us to show Your compassion to others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

