

A HUMBLE SOLDIER'S GREAT FAITH

SIMPLY TEACHING THE WORD SIMPLY—PASTOR CHUCK SMITH

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“I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!” MATTHEW 8:10b

Only twice in the four gospels did Jesus commend anyone for great faith, and both times the person was a non-Israelite: a Roman soldier (Matthew 8, Luke 7) and a Syro-Phoenician woman (Matthew 15). He never commended His own disciples or the religious leaders for great faith.

Faith, you see, isn't something conferred through position, title, or bloodline. We may not have any of those things, but we can still have great faith! Let's take a look at the faith of the Roman soldier, whose faith made Jesus marvel, and see how we can have great faith, too.

Who Was the Centurion?

Several times the New Testament mentions elite Roman soldiers called “centurions,” and every time they are described in a positive light. Though this centurion was from a pagan culture and a leader of about 100 soldiers, he was also a man of remarkable faith. In Luke 7 and Matthew 8, we see several attributes of this man: He was compassionate, humble, and full of faith in Jesus' power and authority.

One day Jesus entered the city of Capernaum and found a group of elders from the local synagogue waiting for Him (Luke 7:1-10). They had come on an urgent mission from a Roman centurion. Matthew's account is condensed, saying that the centurion came to Jesus; this is not contradictory since actions on behalf of the centurion would be considered to be those of the centurion. ***And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die*** (verse 2). In Matthew 8, we learn that this servant had fallen seriously ill with palsy—a painful, paralyzing condition. Now the servant was near death. Rather than get rid of his sickly servant or let him die, the centurion sought help for this servant who was so dear to him—demonstrating care and compassion.

A Humble Faith

Though others described this military leader as worthy, he himself declared to Jesus that he was not—showing humility. When the centurion heard reports of the widespread healing ministry of Jesus, he asked the elders of the synagogue to approach Jesus to heal his servant. The elders ***begged Him earnestly*** (Luke 7:4b) to grant the centurion's request, for they said he loved Israel and was worthy of Jesus' favor.

Jesus started toward the centurion's home. When He approached the house, however, the centurion sent out other friends to Jesus with a message: ***“Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You”*** (Luke 7:6b-7a). The elders had called him worthy; yet, he acknowledged that he was not worthy or deserving to come to Jesus.

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Humility always gets the attention of God. This man's faith was humble. He didn't approach God based on his own merit or earning. We will see that he approached Jesus on the basis of Jesus' authority over the disease of his servant. So, humility and faith get the attention of God, and this Roman soldier had both in great amounts.

Faith in Jesus' Authority

The centurion's message to Jesus continued: ***“But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man placed under authority, having 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”*** (Luke 7:7b-8).

A Roman centurion clearly understood authority. Given charge over a squadron of about 100 soldiers, he understood the chain of command. And in Jesus, he recognized a

Man of both authority and power. “I understand Your authority in the spiritual realm,” he was essentially saying. “I also recognize Your authority over the physical realm. Therefore, I know that You have the authority to merely speak the word and my servant will be healed. Just as I can tell a servant to come and he comes, so can You command this disease to go, and it will go.”

The centurion understood being *in* authority and being *under* authority. The leader who rules well understands that he also is ruled—that he functions under the authority of someone else or a set of laws. Yes, he has authority, but he's not the final authority. As believers, our final authority is Jesus Christ.

The Centurion's Faith Made Jesus Marvel

The soldier had faith to believe not only that Jesus could heal, but that He could heal by merely saying the word. Because of this, the soldier's faith amazed Jesus. ***When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, “I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!”*** (Luke 7:9).

Faith pleases God. When we believe His promises, His heart rejoices. When we understand the power of Jesus, who spoke the world and all we see into existence, we don't doubt His ability or His ultimate authority over all He has made. This kind of faith doesn't ask for proof or additional evidence. It simply believes: What Jesus says, it counts as done. This is the kind of faith the centurion had, and the kind of faith I want.

Then Jesus said to the centurion's representatives, ***“Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you”*** (Matthew 8:13a). Luke records that when the centurion's friends returned to his house, they found the sick man completely well.

Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion. Lord, give us faith that makes You marvel! 🙌