SUCH FAITH

Luke 7:1–10

Key Verse: 7:9

“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.’”

How would you define faith? We might say “trust,” or relate it to hope. Some might quote a Bible verse about it. Today’s passage doesn’t give us an abstract definition, but a real-life example. And it marks a turning point in Luke’s Gospel. In 4:14–5:16 Jesus began his ministry. In 5:17–6:11 there was rising opposition to him. In 6:12–49 he gave his Sermon on the Mount, to train his disciples to become more like him. Now Luke returns to some beautiful stories in the ministry of Jesus. In 7:1–8:3 Luke highlights how Jesus worked with people who were socially unacceptable. And the first person illustrates the main theme. What is it? It’s faith. What is faith, really? How does faith even begin? How does faith affect our lives? Why is faith so important? Today’s passage helps us see it all. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living words today.

According to verse 1, Jesus is now back in Capernaum. Capernaum was a main trading center and fishing town on the Sea of Galilee. Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of buildings from the time of Jesus. During his time it had about 1,500 people, and Jesus made Capernaum the home base for his ministry. He had famously healed many people there (4:23,40). His top disciple Simon Peter had a house there (4:38), and his fishing partners James and John also lived there (5:10). Jesus taught in their synagogue (4:32–33), traveled to the other towns and synagogues of Judea preaching and healing (4:43–44; 5:12), then came back. Most likely, it was the Capernaum synagogue where Pharisees and teachers of the law had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem, to check up on him (5:17). Levi the tax collector probably lived and worked and had a house there (5:27–29). The “mountain” where Jesus prayed all night and called his twelve apostles was nearby, and so was the place where he had given his Sermon on the Mount. Today’s passage also shows that the Roman army had a considerable presence in Capernaum.

Look at verse 1. In Greek it literally says that Jesus had “filled the ears” of people with his words. The words Jesus spoke in his Sermon on the Mount were so radical, so unforgettable, people were still thinking, still talking about them. Look at verse 2. Here Luke highlights a new person, a centurion. Centurions were in charge of 100 Roman soldiers. They were responsible to give the infamous Roman army training. But why were they even there? Generally, it was to enforce collecting taxes, keep the peace, and build roads and buildings. Centurions were often abusive and cruel. But this centurion was different. It says he had a sick servant whom he valued highly. Here, “servant” means “slave.” They were property, used like human tools to do the hard things that richer people didn’t want to do. They got captured in wars, were bought and sold, and maybe earned their freedom. Slaves were expendable, meaning if they got sick, they would be abandoned (e.g. 1Sa30:13). But this centurion was attached to his servant. It says he “highly valued” him. He didn’t just spend a lot of money on him; through living and working together he came to respect and trust him. They became real friends. Between them they had a social and economic gap, and maybe a racial and age gap. But this centurion didn’t consider any of that as important. He didn’t think he was superior or see his slave as inferior—he treated him as a human being, just like himself. It tells us that faith affects how we treat the real people in our lives, each and every day.

Verse 2 adds that now this servant “was sick and at the point of death.” Even if they’d had a good relationship, if the centurion were a selfish man he might have thought it was the time to just move on. But he couldn’t do that. He didn’t just respect his servant—he *loved* him. It’s speaking to us today, telling us that faith still produces in us such genuine love (1Th1:3).

Read at verse 3. We notice a few things here. First of all, the centurion “heard about Jesus.” What did he hear? No doubt a lot, especially there in Capernaum, where Jesus had already done so much. This centurion especially heard that Jesus could *heal*, even desperately sick people. It gave him hope for his sick servant. It tells how faith actually begins. Romans 10:17 says, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”

Secondly, the centurion didn’t go to Jesus in person, but sent “elders of the Jews” in his place. This is strange, on a couple of levels. First of all, why not go in person? The centurion obviously was aware of how Jews would not associate with Gentiles, for religious reasons. Religious Jews thought being with Gentiles would make them unclean, unholy before God. This centurion could have bulldozed his way to Jesus with his military power, but he didn’t do that. He respected their religious rule, even though personally it was a little humiliating.

The other odd thing here is that the local Jewish elders are advocating for him. Why? They’re not the Pharisees or teachers of the law, but the most socially prominent people in town. And in their words to Jesus we can learn why they’re doing this. Read verses 4–5. Despite their social standing, they’re “pleading earnestly.” Despite their tendency to look down on Gentiles and hate their Roman oppressors, they say, “He is worthy to have you do this for him…” Why did they regard the centurion like this? They add, “…for he loves our nation…” What a surprise! The man’s love didn’t stop with his servant; it extended to all the people he was living among. People living in a foreign country tend to despise the locals, thinking their own country and culture are much better. In a foreign country many just isolate themselves, speaking their own language, eating their own food, not getting close to anybody or learning anything, and maybe longing to go back home. But this centurion was different. For him, being in the town of Capernaum began as just a military assignment. But while stationed there he grew to love the Jewish nation and people. This, too, is a part of real faith.

And there’s more. The elders add, “…he is the one who built us our synagogue.” This foreign army officer didn’t just talk well, like a con-artist; he put his money where his mouth was, getting involved in a real act of love. No doubt, leading and training 100 men to do all their army work kept him busy. But he didn’t think he was too busy to be bothered. After being there a while, he realized they needed a synagogue. It’s likely he used his soldiers for the project, spent his own money, and even worked on it with his own hands. He also may have started reading the Old Testament, and definitely valued it being taught. It’s no wonder the Jewish elders came pleading earnestly on his behalf. It shows us that faith gets us involved in active service where we live (Jas2:18).

And how does Jesus respond? Look at verse 6a. What the Jewish elders had just described was so moving. An army centurion who loves his sick servant? Who keeps the required religious distance? Who’s won over the hearts of the Jewish elders by building their synagogue? Who *is* this guy? Jesus didn’t have to go, but hearing all that, he’s ready to go with them. It tells us that Jesus always moves where there is faith. This is one key reason faith is so important.

And there’s one more shocker. When Jesus wasn’t far from the house, the centurion “sent friends,” saying to Jesus, “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…” (6b–7a) By now, it’s not surprising that such a centurion has “friends,” most likely local people who’ve gotten close to him. But what’s even more remarkable is his humility. The elders say he’s “worthy,” but he himself says he’s “not worthy.” Empty people *think* they’re worthy, when they’re not. But this man thinks he’s *not* worthy, when he *is*. This is real humility, and it’s one of Luke’s favorite themes (1:48,52; 14:11; 18:14). Humility isn’t an act we put on, using extreme words or deeds (Col2:18,23 NIV); humility comes from real faith.

The man’s faith is best seen in his final words to Jesus. Look at verse 7b. “But say the word, and let my servant be healed.” What exactly is this telling us about his faith? His faith is in the word of Jesus. He believes the power of Jesus’ word to heal. Often people want to see miracles first, then believe. But this man doesn’t need proof. He doesn’t even need Jesus to be at his house. He's not trying to gain attention or respect; he just quietly loves his servant and wants him to be healed. And he deeply believes Jesus’ word can do it. It’s the climax of all the lessons on faith here: faith in the word of Jesus. It still works today.

How could he have such faith? Look at verse 8. As an army officer, he’s so familiar with the chain of command. Just a spoken word from him, whatever it is, and his men do it right away. In the civilian world this rarely happens. People just think about it, hesitate, question, or even talk back and argue. But this doesn’t happen in the army. In the army, a soldier just obeys his commanding officer. Enough said. Like the Nike ad, they “just do it.” The Bible teaches that this another aspect of real faith: obedience to Jesus (Ro1:5; 16:26; 2Co10:5).

Read verse 9. Usually, people are the ones marveling at Jesus. But in just this one case, Jesus actually marvels at somebody. To the crowd following him he says, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” Jesus has already told two famous Bible stories about Gentile people who had more faith than any Jew of their time (4:25–27). Now Luke the Gentile author highlights this again. It’s a simple message: to Jesus, all that matters is faith—not people’s ethnic or social or religious background, but their faith. That’s all he’s looking for, real faith. Faith is our ticket in to God’s kingdom. Faith is how we come to belong to God’s people—not who we’re related to, what we know, how hard we’ve worked, how faithful we’ve been, what strict rules we keep—only our faith. Faith in Jesus, faith in his word. And one last thing worth mentioning: this man’s faith is not even for himself; it’s on behalf of his sick and dying friend. Wow. Look at verse 10. Boom: the word of Jesus did it. Faith in his word did it. It’s telling us Jesus’ word can still heal even those close to death spiritually. Do we really believe this? This is the heart of real gospel ministry, being healed by the word of Jesus, through faith.

Today, from the centurion we learned many aspects of faith: Faith to respect a fellow human being, faith to love that person, faith to love all the people we live with, faith that serves in our community, faith that produces real humility, and most of all, faith in the word of Jesus, faith to obey it, and faith to pray it will heal those we love. It’s “such faith” that gets Jesus’ attention. It’s “such faith” that brings us, whoever we are, into God’s community, and ultimately, to his kingdom. God still uses “such faith” to heal people who are spiritually dying. So, what really matters? Not what we look like, not how much money we have, not where we live or work or went to school, not how much we know or what position we have or how able we are, but faith. “Such faith.”