

ESF, Lord's day sermon
4/2/2017

Great Faith

Matthew 8:5-13

⁵ When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ⁶ "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." ⁷ Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him."

⁸ The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ 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."

¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹¹ I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour.

The story is told about the first time that actress Helen Hayes decided to cook a Thanksgiving dinner for her family. Before serving it, she announced to her husband and son, "Now, I know that this is the first turkey I've ever cooked. If it isn't any good, I don't want anybody to say a word. We'll just get up from the table, without comment, and go to a restaurant to eat. Then she returned to the kitchen.

When she came back out to the dining room bearing the turkey, she found her husband and son seated at the table with their hats and coats on. Obviously, they didn't have much faith in her ability to cook a turkey!

Often, we're like that with God. We have problems and we pray to God for help, then we sit back and expect the worst to happen. Often, we don't have much faith in Him. This morning we want to look at a man who was different. A man of great faith. In fact, a man who Jesus stated as having the greatest faith in Israel. Who do you think it is: Peter? John? Paul? No. It was a man who was neither a Jew nor one of Jesus' disciples. It was a Roman soldier. This story teaches us that to have great faith, we don't need to be long time believers. We don't need to pray years and years. We don't need to know complicated doctrines or theology. We don't need to know ancient Hebrew or Greek. We need to do only a couple of things.

Accept God's unconditional love in Jesus

Faith comes from receiving love. Usually when a child receives mother's tender love, the child learns to trust the mom. With this trust, the child can trust other people. But if a child grows up without receiving mother's love, the child does not know how to trust not only mom but also other people.

When God teaches us to trust Him, He loves us first. When we receive God's love, we can learn to trust Him.

The centurion was able to have great faith when he accepted God's love demonstrated through Jesus. He had heard that Jesus loved all kinds of people unconditionally without any discrimination. He had heard that with unconditional love Jesus performed miracles for all kinds of people. And he believed that in Jesus' love there is no distinction between the rich and the poor, between the master and the servant, between the long-time believers and new believers, between the Jews and the Gentiles.

How do we know that? As a Gentile, he had no right to ask God's favor as the Jews could. But he boldly asked Jesus for God's favor. This is the evidence that he believed in God's unconditional love through Jesus.

He believed that God loves everyone who comes to Him through Jesus, even a Gentile like himself. He believed that in Jesus God embraces every race, every human being regardless of race, skin color, social status, or rank. He believed that in Jesus' love, he and his servant were equal. He believed that in Jesus' love, a Gentile like himself and the Jews were equal. This belief enabled him to approach Jesus, a Jew and the master of all masters, with great faith. When he understood and accepted that love, he had no fear to approach Jesus and ask for a big favor for his sick servant.

Paul says in Galatians 3:26-29:

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, ... There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

In those days, a sick servant could be easily regarded as useless property by his owner. But the centurion treated his sick servant as a decent human being, and did his best to help the sick servant. When we accept God's unconditional love we also can respect and love all kinds of people without discrimination. This love gives us great faith.

There is a story of the Duke of Wellington and a poor old man at church. While the Duke of Wellington remained to take communion, a very poor old man went up the opposite aisle, and reaching the Communion table, knelt near the Duke. Immediately, tension and commotion interrupted the silence of the church. Someone came and touched the poor man on the shoulder, and whispered to him, "Rise and wait until the Duke has taken!" But the eagle eye and the quick ear of the great commander caught the meaning of that touch and that whisper. He clasped the old man's hand and held him down to prevent his rising; and in a reverential but distinct undertone, the Duke said, "Do not move; we are equal here."

It was not the centurion's own love that enabled him to love his sick servant. It was Jesus' unconditional love which the centurion accepted in

his heart. Such love gave the centurion courage to come to the Son of God and ask His favor boldly.

It is God's unconditional love which enables us to have great faith. When we receive God's great love in Jesus, we can love others. With faith in God's great love, we can boldly ask His favor for us and others.

Ephesians 3:12

In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Hebrews 4:16 *Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

Do you need miraculous deliverance today? Does anybody you know need a miraculous healing or deliverance today? Believe in God's unconditional love in Christ. Approach God boldly and ask great favor for yourself and others.

Submit to God's almighty authority in Jesus

Every trust we have in this world is related to authority. Governing everything through authority is the way God keeps order in this world. We maintain our lives in the context of human authority. If we observe this authority carefully, we realize that God's authority is behind every legitimate authority of this world. God gives parents authority to take care of their children. God gives government leaders authority to govern their people (Romans 13:1-7).

Trust or faith goes together with certain kinds of authority. If there is no authority in this world, there would be no trust in anything, and this world would fall into chaos. If we trust and follow God's governing principle of authority, we can receive God's grace and blessings.

This is what the centurion understood and believed.

As a soldier of the Roman Empire, he knew that the power of the Empire came from the authority of the emperor Caesar. He knew that he was under the powerful authority of Caesar. As a centurion, a Roman military officer, he knew that he had authority over the soldiers under his rule. He knew that the authority gave him power.

Then he thought about the authority of Jesus: *What kind of authority does Jesus have? Because of all the miracles he had performed for the people, I realize that his authority is superior to any human authority. No human authority has the power to do what he has been doing. No human authority can access such power to heal the sick. His authority must be the authority of God.*

By considering all the things Jesus did and taught he understood that the authority of Jesus was the authority of God Himself. When he believed God's authority through Jesus, he was able to believe Jesus could do the impossible. He believed that whatever Jesus said would happen just as He said. He believed that Jesus could heal his sick servant when no one else could: *"... Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 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 (verses 8-9).*

The centurion's faith was to believe God's supernatural authority in Jesus. Jesus honored the centurion's faith, calling it 'great faith': *When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith (verse 10).*

We can learn how to have great faith through this centurion's example.

When we study carefully how the authorities in this world function, we can understand how the authority of God functions. When we observe how God reveals His authority in this world, we can see God's authority in Jesus' name. If we observe what Jesus is doing in this world, we see God's authority in His name. We can understand that God exercises His authority through His Own Son, Jesus.

Matthew 7:29 says that "Jesus taught as one who had authority."

Matthew 9:6 says, "the Son of man has authority on earth."

Jesus claims that He has "all authority in heaven and on earth" and He is with His disciples always (Matthew 28:18).

In Jesus' name, God transforms people. In Jesus' name God turns people from their sinful ways and makes them new persons. In Jesus' name, God heals those no doctors can heal.

God's authority in Jesus is still alive and active today. Jesus has the authority to break every evil power. He has the authority to transform man's heart and forgive our sins. He has the authority to bring us into the eternal kingdom beyond our death. And He gives this authority to all who submit themselves to His authority.

If Jesus has all authority, then wouldn't He be able to take care of your problem?

Do you want Jesus' authority? Would you like to have the authority to be victorious in your own personal life — to conquer bad habits and defeat the demonic forces which come against you? Then submit yourself to His authority.

In the movie "Forrest Gump," when Forrest first arrived at the army barracks, he met a drill sergeant who stood in his face as he stood in line with the recruits, and shouted: "Gump! What's your purpose in the Army?" Forrest answered: To do whatever you tell me, Sir!

Confess with your mouth that Jesus has God's authority. Be ready to obey whatever He tells you to do. Claim His authority in your life.