

## Faith and Doubt and Everything in Between

### Amazing Faith - Luke 7:1-10

What is faith and who has it?

Would it surprise you if I told you everyone has it? The fact is that everyone one of us has faith.

- What is it when you sit down in a chair? Faith
- What is it when you drive your car and start applying the brakes? Faith
- What about when you pass by a car going 45 miles per hour and at that same moment it passes you - just a few feet away, but you never have fear? Faith
- Why aren't you scared at the end of each day when the sun ducks below the horizon? Faith
- What is it each year when Cubs fans think this might be the year? Exactly...Stupidity

Seriously, we all live with faith in many things. You could say we are people of faith. You might even say we were created for faith. Therefore, the fact that anyone has faith is not remarkable, but sometimes, people have faith in God that is remarkable and that is what I would like to focus on today.

For context, let me review a bit about where we were just a week ago.

Syler did an amazing job framing up the story of God. He focused on a prologue and two acts.

#### The Prologue

- God created the world and everything in it and it was good.
- God created the first humans and they too were good - and they had free will.
- With their free will they doubted God's goodness and love for them and chose sin.
- God restores them promising that someday sin will be overturned by the "seed of woman"

#### Act One

- God promises Abraham a people and a place and makes a covenant to redeem
- Eventually, they become the Israelites, and become known as Hebrews or the Jews
- The Old Testament then tracks these people through ups and downs including slavery in Egypt, a Conquest, evil invaders, a powerful kingdom, a divided kingdom, exile, captivity and finally restoration and waiting on the Messiah - 400 years of silence.

#### Act Two

- There is excitement around the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. Jesus continues to amaze through his powerful miracles and teaching to a point.
- Jesus upsets the established religious leaders (God's covenant people) and is eventually betrayed, accused, tried and killed. He is placed in a tomb, resurrected in the power of God and brings hope for all the world.

The response to this story of God's love and redemption is faith or what Syler called, Chapter Three. We saw examples of faith through the cardboard testimonies as many were able to understand challenging circumstances and sometimes even their own messes, through the eyes of a God that still loves them and is wanting a relationship with them. They have hope and comfort in His love. That is faith.

To further explore this idea of faith, we return the book of Luke and begin a new series called Faith, Doubt and Everything in Between. Today specifically we look at the faith of the centurion and explore AMAZING FAITH.

*7.1 When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, 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." 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.*

## **Setting the Scene**

As we begin to explore the passage there are many observations that we get to make that help us gain understanding of the situation.

### **7.1 When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.**

- When they are mentioning “saying all this” recall this is the teaching series called “Right Side Up”
  - This is referring to Luke’s version of the sermon on the mount - possibly the same teaching, or maybe another teaching delivered on a plain (not plane per Syler’s joke)
  - This included teaching like blessed are the poor and hungry, and those who weep; love your enemies; turn the other cheek; examine yourselves before judging others; build a house on the rock and not just in the easiest places.
  - Jesus has now returned to Capernaum - this is Jesus’ new “hometown”; you may recall in Nazareth he preached and was run out of town, so his disciples are now based here. This is on the Northwest “corner” of the Sea of Galilee;
  - Jesus has done many miracles in this place - healed a demon-possessed man, another man who was lowered through a roof when the room was too packed, Peter’s mother-in-law (I am not sure if anyone ever asked Peter how he felt about that.)
  - When Jesus returned here, it was a place where his miracles and teaching were familiar.

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

- Centurion is a Roman ruler in charge of 100 men (think “century”)

- Polybius described centurions like this “They must be not so much seekers after danger, as men who can command, steady in action and reliable; they ought not to be over anxious to rush into a fight, but when hard-pressed they must be ready to hold their ground and die at their posts.”
- He would be sent to keep the peace in the region which is under oppressive rule by the Romans - he might normally be hated and brutish
- Think of a Mel Gibson in Braveheart; Deniro in The Godfather; maybe the Dos Equis man - the most interesting man in the world, or dare I say - Chuck Norris (maybe not THAT cool)
- But immediately we learn something else about him... “he highly valued his servant”
- This begins to paint a bit of an unexpected picture of caring and kindness
- This is even more surprising because servants had no rights and were considered “just property”; it was not uncommon, or illegal, to just kill your servant when they became valueless - not so for the centurion

### **The Myth of Faith**

When this scene starts, the centurion is sending a Jewish delegation to rabbi Jesus in order to seek his help in healing his servant. Unfortunately, the very ones we might expect to be a model of faith, actually present a myth of faith.

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

- It is not surprising that the centurion would have heard of Jesus as this was the home-base and on some occasions at least, Jesus did have an amazing following
- What is surprising and easily missed here is that the centurion sent Jewish elders - normally the Jews hated the Roman authorities. Since the Jews were God's privileged and special people, under God alone, it was a horrible oppression to live under Roman rule and Roman taxes. There was great tension - even one of Jesus own followers was “Simon the Zealot” and is among a sect that desperately wanted to remove the Romans. Another follower of Christ was Matthew - a tax collector. Tax collectors were absolute outcasts for their willingness to side with Rome and betray their own. Yet here, we see Jewish Elders on an errand to invite Jesus to help the centurion.
- You might think the elders were ordered to do this under the authority of the centurion, but look at this next line...

### **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.”**

- It was the elders pleading with Jesus earnestly - not by force but truly wanting Jesus to help this man. Listen to their words...
- “the man deserves to have you help him...he loves our nation; he built the synagogue:
- So much to see here - for instance the portrait of the centurion is expanded, he is somehow good to the Jewish people and loving toward them, further he must have great wealth that is coupled with generosity - he built the synagogue (the church).
- But let’s not miss another point that is a little sad.

- The Jewish people are the ones who are meant to be God's people, dearly loved, chosen. They should know God and know the heart of God for the people. Yet listen to their basis for why Jesus should help...BECAUSE OF WHAT HE DOES/DID!
- It is easy to miss this - because it is just a few words, but I think another reason we miss it, is because this reasoning is not that foreign to us. It is very difficult for us to separate our thinking about faith and works. Thus when we think of those Jesus loves, and answers the prayers for, it is often first in our minds that he does this for good people.
- That is why it is so popular to ask, "why do bad things happen to good people?" something in us can't let go of the idea of being good enough for God to love us, or so good, that we actually have God doing for us whatever we want. In God's eyes, there is none righteous, no not one.

The myth of faith is that religious practice, religious titles, a religious family/people or good works would compel Jesus (and by extension, God) to act on their behalf and do what they hope. As it is seen later, and as we understand through the rest of the text for today, this was not the least bit compelling to Christ then - just as it is not today.

### **The Miracle of Faith**

As is often the case in Jesus' stories, the real heroes are often coming from the least expected locations. Think the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the Pharisee and the tax collector or most unexpectedly the good Samaritan. Well in this case as well - the Jewish elders did not reflect true faith, but as we look again at the centurion, we see the Miracle of Faith.

#### **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.”**

- Note the contrast - Jesus went with the elders originally (I am not sure why) and yet the centurion has another message for Jesus ("Stop, In the Name of Love")
- Three noteworthy items further reflecting the character of the centurion:
  - I don't deserve your visit... he was utterly aware of himself. Not his power or position - you see this would have shocked all the others (except Jesus)...the centurion had more earthly power and position than Jesus and should not in any way feel unworthy. but he does. He understands himself in a spiritual way in light of God's view of him - not his own.
  - I don't deserve you is also surprising because the elders had just finished saying that he does deserve Jesus' help. He makes no claim to Jesus or supposes no rights before him.
  - It is also worth noting he was familiar with the ways of rabbis and gentiles. He knew that a Jew was not to associate with him as a gentile and therefore, if Jesus entered his house, then he would need to follow up the visit with a dramatic and lengthy ritual cleansing. What Jesus may have been willing to do - the centurion wanted to avoid - He did not want to inconvenience Jesus.

- On another note, it is amazing that the centurion understood something about authority.
- He recognizes the power of Jesus - “just say the word” He understands commands, but if Jesus said the word, who did he think Jesus was commanding
- The centurion understands that Jesus is over the powers of creation and the world; he understood he was under the authority of God himself; thus he sees the impact of the word itself. “Just say the word.”
- He is recognizing Jesus is more than a rabbi, he is God’s son, He is the one, he has the power to heal - he was desperate, in spite of his concern for Jesus’ convenience, he knew there was nowhere else to turn - he needed Jesus.
- This is a bit like Peter’s declaration when Jesus asks, “Who do you say I am?” The centurion understands that Jesus is from God and that is great faith. He knows Jesus is not just a great teacher but that he has the power to do miracles.

The miracle in all of this is that what the centurion knew, he did not know by intellect, he did not prove it through facts and science - he simply understood through God. Scripture describes Jesus as the “author and perfecter of our faith” meaning we don’t make it or develop it. The centurion had the blessing of God revealing himself to him and he had the chance to respond to it now.

### **The Result of Faith**

**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 was “amazed” by a person - this in fact only happens twice in Scripture … he is positively amazed at the centurions heart and faith (Luke 7:9), and he was once negatively amazed by the lack of faith in Nazareth. (Mark 6:6)
- Jesus heals the servant without ever meeting the servant at all - heals with his word at a distance.

Luke has done it again, he has shown that Jesus was a God who loved the unlikely - the least, the last and the lost. He is looking for authentic belief more than showy belief. He is looking for people wanting to be in a relationship with him and not those simply being religious.

Six times in Luke Jesus praises someone or performs a miracle in response to the faith that person showed. How many of those do you think were the disciples are religious leaders? None. How many were from the established and religious elite? None. So whose faith does Jesus praise in the book of Luke:

1. The men who climbed onto a roof and lowered their paralyzed friend in to see Jesus.
2. The centurion.
3. The woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her hair and tears. (in front of a Pharisee no less)
4. The bleeding woman who reached out in a crushing crowd, just to touch Jesus garment.
5. The SAMARITAN leper who was healed and returned to thank Jesus
6. The blind beggar calling out to Christ

Faith is often found in the wounded and the outcasts, in those on the outside. How strange that the strongest faith that Luke reports is in the cripples, women, unclean and rejected, foreigners, outcasts or prostitutes. Do you see a pattern at all? A broken heart - a heart with a cardboard story of its own can seek Jesus and find hope and faith. How ironic in a world where today people of faith are seen as judgmental, hypocritical or exclusive? True faith empties all rights and claims and comes before Jesus wanting more of him, his authority and his love.

People who recognize that what they are suspecting and learning about God is in fact true and that the God who walked this earth is looking for faith and drawing people to himself. Just as today, “the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.” (2 Chronicles 16:9)

But not just the down and out -

The centurion was an up and comer: wealthy, great job, good values and morals, friends who would go to bat for him, yet still, he called himself nothing and sought out Jesus. This is the call to Amazing Faith - faith like the centurion. Though we may not feel broken, we may be good and loving, still - we are to grow our faith with Jesus.

### **The Response of Faith (use spectrum diagram from -5 to +5)**

#### ***Justifying Faith***

Justifying Faith is the faith that initiates an eternal relationship with God. When you have this faith, you are ensured the promise and the confidence of living with God for eternity. This means you have a relationship with God.

Let's consider a familiar diagram at Christ Church - the -5 to +5 spectrum.

- This diagram if you recall runs from the far from God/no God side (Satan, Hitler, Packers Fans) to the near to God side (God, Mother Theresa, Bears fans, etc)
- Zero is the point where a person crosses from negative numbers into positive numbers
- This happens through Christ's work on the cross

So, how do you know if this is true? It is said in Alpha, the certainty of faith is a bit like a tripod.

The first leg is God's promise through the Word of God.

- Faith that recognizes God's love for you
- Faith that recognizes the problem of our sin
- Faith that recognizes God's provision of Christ as the perfect sacrifice
- This is summed up in one sense in John 3:16; or a collection of verses in Romans
  - All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God
  - But God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were yet sinners he sent Christ to die for us
  - The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord
- There is more, but we have great confidence in God's word
- In an earthly sense, let me put it another way - since faith is about a deep relationship, you might understand it well in thinking about marriage.

- Amy and I have been married for 17 years - in fact, we were married in this church in 1996 - long before we would ever return here with our family in 2004 or join the staff in 2011.
- One of the ways I know we are married is our wedding license. God's word is like that...it includes many promises that promise when we reach out IN FAITH, he will begin a permanent relationship with him.
- Not everyone knows that date - for me, it was July 11, 1987 and I know where I was, what I was doing, and what was going on in my life as I became a Christian. This is not the case for some others.
- C.S. Lewis put it this way...Train from Paris to Berlin

The second leg of the Faith tripod is the Work of Jesus

- I know I am a Christian because of God's word that tells me if I have faith - if I believe in him - then I will have eternal life...
- I also know I am a Christian because of what Christ has done - the death and resurrection
- Not just the sacrifice for sin, but the demonstrated power over death and promise of an eternal future with the Father
- In the marriage analogy...how do I know I am married? The wedding day. I have pictures and memories of that day. I know I am married from those events.
- Faith is living in the certainty that what Christ did on the Cross, allowed you to receive forgiveness for sin and the hope of eternity with God.

The third leg of the Faith tripod is the Witness of the Holy Spirit

- I know I am married because I have a license; I know because I had a wedding day
- More than anything, I know because we have lived life together for 17 years...we have had children, raised children, gone on trips, dreamt dreams, suffered loss, established a home...
- This is like the life WITH Christ - as I live in relationship with him, the Holy Spirit confirms in my spirit that I love Jesus. I enjoy God's word, I begin to think more like God, to look and act more like God all through the Holy Spirit who makes me more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, gentle, good, faithful or self-controlled.

You may be asking, "Does God want this relationship with me?" Not only did he send his son to die for our sins that we could know him, but revelation 3:20 says that even now, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him." He is waiting, but we need to open the door to him in our life.

## **Sanctifying Faith**

This leads us to remember the other side of faith.

Justifying faith is the initial faith to get going as a Christian in God's grace.

- For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God. Not by works so that no one should boast.
- But just as above I mentioned the third leg of the tripod is the experience of the Christian life, this third leg is lived by Sanctifying Faith
- Sanctifying Faith is the faith that allows us to continue to live each day in relationship to God seeking to live life as Jesus would, if he were to live it in our place.

- So if you remember our diagram - this is not crossing from negative into positive; rather this is moving from +.01 to +4.99

For we live by faith, not by sight. (2 Cor 5:7)

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. (Hebrews 11:1)  
Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Do you hear those two parts?

- faith is what pleases God
- faith is both believing he exists (Justifying); and earnestly seeks (Sanctifying)

It is here that faith is like a muscle that we are to exercise and grow. How?

- Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. (God's Word helps us grow in faith)
  - We get to know God in relationship with Him
  - We get to know his promises and his re-assurance and we cling to these
- Another way to grow faith is to pray and see God's faithfulness and answers to prayer.
  - God granted me a summer where he allowed me to grow my faith in a new way
    - A watch, a disruptive child, a car that wouldn't start, a drive across the country
- Finally God is pleased when we watch and see where he is working and we join him in that work
  - This takes reflection, quiet, journaling, praying, interacting with others
  - This takes courage and boldness; willingness to trust that God has the best in mind for us

There is one ultimate form of faith - "Father knows Best" trusting his plan for you rather than trying to make it happen on our own. The centurion had faith that for all his compassion, his kindness, his wealth, his power and anything else he had in his favor; none of it mattered in light of what he hoped to have happen in the life of his servant. He knew that for the things that mattered most, he must go to Jesus.

Paul puts it this way, "I consider all my accolades rubbish compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus." Trusting in his promises, trading what is ours for what it is, trying a new way in Him." This is the faith of the centurion; this is the faith that "Amazed Jesus." I encourage you to pursue Amazing Faith.