

At Your Word (Luke 7:1-10)

1. The resume of the centurion from the perspective of the elders (v.1-5):

- After Jesus' Sermon on the Plain (6:20-49), He (presumably) entered Capernaum (v.1). Jesus will model for the crowd who follow Him (v.9) how far His kingdom (and ethics) will expand, as well as whom it will include. How far will Jesus go to do good? (6:27-36)?
- Luke now narrates and describes a centurion who requests Jesus to come to his house.

Centurion:

- He was an officer in the Roman military who commanded one hundred men and was one of sixty such officers in a Roman legion (approx. 6,000 soldiers). Like other Roman officers, he used his wealth for *muneras* (public services and civil projects).
- He was previously a Roman soldier who had proven reliable and committed to Rome in battle and war. Consequently, he would have been awarded wealth for his victories.
- This centurion was a Gentile, though not necessarily a Roman.

This centurion had a slave who was sick to the point of death (v.2) and, as a result, sent the elders of Capernaum to Jesus, asking Him to come (to his house) and heal his servant (v.3):

- This centurion has heard about Jesus' miracles, including (at the least) what Jesus did previously when He was in Capernaum several months ago (4:31-5:11).
- Generally, the Romans despised the Jews and had limited interaction due to cultural norms. However, he requests Jesus through the mediation of the elders. Why would the elders grant his request?
- It was a custom to dispatch respected elders of a local Jewish community to plead a case (Lk. 7:18-19; 9:52; 10:1; Acts 25:15).

Who are these elders? They were the rulers of local communities who would legislate and oversee judicial matters and were often members of the local synagogue.

What did the elders say to Jesus? "He built a synagogue (in Capernaum), loves the nation of Israel, and is worthy to be visited by You" (v.4-5).

Why did the elders say he was worthy? Either: they believed that the centurion was a man of character who built the synagogue because he was a generous man and (potential) God-fearer, OR they were lauding him because that was the cultural norm of the day, as a quid-pro-quo.

Why did the centurion build a synagogue with his wealth? Either:

- A. He built a synagogue with no ulterior motives than love toward the people and perhaps their God (as a God-fearing Gentile).
- B. It was a political ploy to be in good standing with the people Rome governed. In constructing the synagogue, he would honor their religion (though not believing in it) and keep the peace. Capernaum's elders and people would discharge their obligation and acknowledge him by advertising his generosity and eminence.

*The only comment we have from Luke about the character of this centurion is that he has a servant, whom he values and esteems very much, who is very sick. The centurion's desire for the slave to return to full health is nothing extraordinary, as this was a well-practiced ethic during Roman antiquity.

The elders, in Luke's gospel, are always portrayed with tension against Jesus and His mission, often being placed alongside the Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees who oppose Jesus (7:3; 9:22; 15:25; 20:1; 22:52). They are silent about the spiritual condition of the centurion.

2. The resume of the centurion from the perspective of the centurion (v.3-8):

- Jesus responded favorably to the request of the elders and went with them to the centurion's home (v.6), thus fulfilling His kingdom ethic (6:27-36).
- As Jesus approached the centurion's home (v.6), He was intercepted by a second delegation: the centurion's friends. Their message betrays the testimony of the elders:
 - The elders added that the centurion was "worthy" (v.4), while the friends said he was "unworthy" (v.6).

Did the elders misspeak? Did the grace of God come to this centurion between the first delegation (elders) and the second (his friends)?

- The centurion's friends speak in the first person, representing what he "would have said" before Jesus.
- Jesus is called "Lord," which either means "sir, master, or teacher" or a "term of divinity" such as a prophet. The centurion is not acknowledging the deity of Christ but instead renders Him a title of honor and respect.

The interaction between the friends and Jesus is astonishing:

- Something has happened to the centurion. He transitions from summoning Jesus to his house to being unworthy of Jesus to come to his house, let alone face to face.
- To illustrate this change, the friends use an example conducive to the centurion's life: the centurion both gives and receives orders (v.7).
- Jesus is like the centurion, yet greater, for Jesus can heal with "just a word" (v.8).

The miracle of the centurion is his humility and sight (faith). He is humble and unworthy in his disposition to Jesus yet believes that all Jesus must do is "say the word." Somehow, the centurion believes that at Jesus' word, sickness and death obey Him.

Where did this "faith" come from? No other miracles up to this point were done without Jesus physically present (4:31-35, 38-41; 5:1-11, 12-13, 17; 6:6-10). God granted him faith.

No reason is given for the centurion's sense of unworthiness due to conviction of sin unless humility was the fruit of such conviction (as a Gentile outside of the covenant, without the Scriptures).

3. The resume of the centurion from the perspective of Jesus (v.9-10):

- Jesus is "amazed" and turns to the crowds (v.9). Jesus is omniscient (all-knowing) as God, but as man, He is still learning (2:40).
 - In all the Gospels, Jesus is mentioned as being "amazed" only twice. Negatively, at the unbelief of the townspeople of Nazareth (Mk. 6:6). Positively, He is amazed at the centurion's faith (Lk. 7:9).
- He is amazed because this powerful, wealthy, war-torn, uncircumcised Gentile centurion, outside of the covenant of Israel and without the Law of Moses, declares himself unworthy (in an attitude of humility) of having Jesus come under his roof. He concludes that Jesus can "speak" the word, and his slave will be healed. This Gentile has "faith" that no one in the crowd has. How did he come to believe that all Jesus had to do was "say the word"?
- The healing of the slave is an afterthought to the centurion's faith.

Points of Application: