

Great Faith is Based on Jesus' Coming to Save

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Sometimes something is so good that the only way to describe it is to compare it with everything else. You might talk this way about a restaurant and say, "Nobody does it like that restaurant, they're the best." Some company's employ this technique. Bosa Donuts; "best donuts in Arizona." Or you might boast, "There's not a better vacation spot anywhere!" But be careful if you ever start to do this with home cooking. Once when I was a guest at someone's house, I had a delicious plate of pork. Thinking it was the best pork I ever had I tried to contrast it with all other pork loins I've ever tasted. So while I was sitting right next to my wife, without thinking I said to our host, "I didn't know pork could ever taste this good!" Today we read in Luke 7 about time when Jesus was amazed at someone. He was so amazed at him that he said there was no one else in all of Israel like him. The man was outstanding because he had a faith unlike everyone around him. What does it mean to have great faith? We see this morning why Jesus praised this man's faith and what made it stand out from the rest of the people in Israel. And as we consider Jesus' response to this man, we see what it means to have great faith.

This man was a centurion, an army official in charge of many troops. He had received word that Jesus was returning back to his area. When it says he "heard about Jesus" it becomes clear he wasn't clueless as to who Jesus was and all he had said and done. What he heard about Jesus was that he was now back in Capernaum. And this was good news for this particular man. He had a servant who was sick and dear death. And this servant was very dear to him and close to him. He needed Jesus to save his dying servant.

Sure, the man was an important figure in society. But in Jesus' culture he was an outsider, a non-Jewish man, a Gentile. Would Jesus listen to *his* plea for help? The elders of the Jews went to get Jesus and plead on this man's behalf. They evidently worried that Jesus might not want to come to help this centurion and his servant. After all, why would Jesus listen to him? Jesus was a very busy and important man, and this request for help was from some non-Jew. So the elders of the Jews came and found Jesus and began to plead this man's case. He was deserving of Jesus' time, they argued. "He loves our nation. He is a patriot to the people of God; he loves our people." And as if that wasn't enough this man was a *good* man. "He built our synagogue for us of his own resources!" He was a godly man who helped support the worship services in town. They had to point out why they thought Jesus should help this man and save his servant: he was deserving of Jesus' help.

We have to wonder, "Why does Jesus help anyone?" Maybe we sometimes reason that Jesus likes to help those who love him the most. We know that's not true. We understand that Jesus helps more than church builders and the people who appear really good. Yet aren't we sometimes left wondering, "would Jesus ever listen to someone like me?" We reason to ourselves, "Would Jesus ever help me? I guess maybe I've been a good person." You may not admit to it, but don't we like to rely on those things which we like to think make us more deserving of God's attention? "Okay Lord, I'm praying to you. I hope you noticed that I came to church this Sunday. I even gave a you an extra fifty bucks this morning, God." Does that make any difference with Jesus? Does he listen more carefully to good people who do good things for him? "Okay God, I checked off *ten* items on the church spring cleaning list. *Now* how about checking off one or two things on *my* list for me?" Why does Jesus listen? "I deserve it," our thoughts cry out. Well, sure, we *know* it's not because we took the effort to show up for church to pray, *we know* it's not because we did something good that Jesus pays attention to our needs. "But it couldn't hurt" we argue as we try to answer the fateful question. "*Why does Jesus help anyone?*" The elders of the Jews thought Jesus would be more prone to pay attention if this man was deserving of help. "He's a good man, he deserves a good turn from you, God."

Why would Jesus ever pay attention to us to help us? If even this man-- who built a synagogue-- can't claim to be deserving of Jesus' help, how can we? Last I checked none of us ever footed the entire bill to build a church. Funny thing is that if you are at all like me you are sometimes still trying to add up what you have done that compares to church-building. **Why does Jesus help anyone? Why would he ever want to help us?**

Jesus **did go** with the elders of the Jews and started walking to this centurion's house. It seems the centurion was surprised by this. He wanted Jesus to save his servant, yes, but this was more than he asked! "He's actually taking the trouble to walk here?! I just wanted you to ask Jesus to *heal* him. Now you have him *coming* here?" And the elders of the Jews probably thought they knew why: "He's deserving." **The centurion knew better.** "I don't deserve. I'm not even worthy."

In the world we praise those who do good things as those with 'great faith' and 'worthy' of God's saving. People clamor, "That person was a saint and deserves a place in heaven, after all she has done." But even if every elder in every church might plead her case it wouldn't make any difference. God **doesn't look at what one deserves.** The centurion knew this was the case. He said, "*I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.*"

So someone might ask, "If the centurion knew he was unworthy of Jesus, then why did he bother him?" We see that this man had a great faith. His faith was so outstanding that only he seemed to understand the correct answer to why Jesus would help anyone. The answer was clear to him. The answer is found in the word grace. It is God's undeserved love for the sinner that causes him to act in love for anyone. The man had such a faith that he knew Jesus paid attention to his troubles despite his unworthiness. This man knew Jesus acted on **grace**. Great faith is based on Jesus' coming to save. *in grace*

Jesus says that this centurion has an outstanding faith—one which was not found in Israel. It's something of a sad commentary on the people of Israel that this outsider is the one who has great faith. In fact, there are only two times in Scripture where Jesus commends someone's faith and this man is one of them. The other is a woman who also happens to be a foreigner and was from outside of Israel.

If Jesus couldn't find such a faith in Israel, then why did he come to Israel? We see the only other time that it mentions he is amazed is when he is amazed at the unbelief of a city in Israel. Why did he come to them? They didn't deserve it at all! He came to them for the same reason he came to this man who understood he was not worthy: grace. It was to an undeserving world that Jesus came in order to save us. We did not deserve his attention. To think that we have somehow deserved it is to lose sight of the very same thing that the elders of the Jews began to lose sight of: grace. Even though we could never be worthy to have any attention from Jesus, he came. In grace he came. He did far more in his grace that go along with those elders of the Jews toward this centurion's house. He left the eternal gloried of heaven to come and be born in this world. And there was no one, not even this synagogue builder that made Jesus say, "they deserve my help." It is only by his grace. In his great undeserved love, the worthiest man that ever lived died a most undeserved death. The death that we all deserve, the punishment of hell for hearts set against God, Jesus freely took from us. And the gift of eternal life, which none deserve, he *freely* gives to all.

Great faith is based on Jesus' coming to save. Jesus praised this man's faith because his faith was in Jesus coming to save in grace. But there was another reason this man's faith stood out. He not only saw God's grace, but his limitless power. The Jews were expecting that Jesus *had to come to his house*. Isn't it odd that we often have a preconceived notion on how God ought to carry out his plans? Sometimes we even are dictating to him just how his should provide rescue. "Okay God, if you really are going to help me on this one, then I need you to do this for me right now in this way." Do we sometimes act like God can only save in a limited way and by our prescribed methods?

On the surface it might seem like the centurion was doing this. He told Jesus not to come to his house. When he heard the Jesus was actually coming to his house, he sent some of his friends to intercept Jesus. "Don't trouble yourself Jesus." **Why?** Not because the centurion wanted Jesus to save his servant in *a certain way*, but because he knew Jesus **wasn't limited** to saving his servant in the way the Jews thought. "I know that you can simply say the word and my servant will be healed." The man wasn't telling Jesus what to do, but he was in all humility pointing out that he understands that Jesus *didn't have to come* to his house like the elders of the Jews thought. The man knew that Jesus *wasn't limited to come* and save in the way that they expected him to. This man understood authority. He told one man under him "Go" and he would go. He would tell another man "come" and he would come. He knew Jesus had authority. Unlike him, Jesus was not under any authority but the ultimate authority. "Just say the word, Jesus." His power is limitless. He doesn't need to heal or save in the way that we sometimes think it needs to be done.

Jesus who had all authority didn't have to come to save, but he chose to come and to demonstrate his great love by laying aside all his authority and power in order to save us. If God choose to do so, he could have saved us some other way. But he chooses to demonstrate and give his great love for us. He chose to come to this earth and die in our place. He chose to take on human flesh to walk toward that man's house, and to eventually walk toward the cross. And now because he faced death and won the victory over sin and death, he does have the power to save. "All authority has been given" to him. He holds all authority over sin and death. We can fully trust is word to save. When he says, "your sins are forgiven," we don't demand that he give us a personal vision, we don't demand that he show us a glimpse of heaven, we don't even demand that he speaks directly to us. We take him at his word, knowing if he says it is so, then it is so. If he says we are forgiven, we are. If he promises eternal life, we know we have it. He promises to work all things to our good, we know he can, and he does.

Great faith is based on Jesus' coming to save in grace and with all authority. Great faith sees the limitless grace and limitless power of our God. Thank God that it is not up to us to convince Jesus to come and save. All our attempts to make ourselves look worthy of his saving only downplay his great worth and his great grace for undeserving sinners. Thank God that it is not up to us to dictate just how our God is to save us. His plan assures us that he does indeed have all authority as our Savior. Great faith is not based on what we do or believe. Great faith is simply knowing and relying on these truths about our God: Jesus comes to save in grace, and Jesus comes to save with all authority. Great faith you see is simply based on our great Lord Jesus Christ. Why does God help anyone? Because he is such a great God! Great and outstanding faith is based on knowing and trusting in the outstanding grace of our God displayed in Jesus and in the great and outstanding power and authority which he holds as our Savior.