

Making Jesus Marvel

July 8th, 2012

Luke 7:1-10

"⁶And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, 'Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ⁷Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.'" ⁹When 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."

One of the things I've tried to stress as we've gone through this series in Luke is that Jesus Christ is worthy of the greatest "Oh!" of our souls. Our souls are wired to find our greatest thrills in the admiration of greatness. Fireworks on the 4th of July, the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, a Broadway musical, the Super Bowl, are beams of glory light, intended to drive us up into the infinite, eternal object worthy of our admiration, enthusiasm, praise and delight: Jesus (Ephesians 3:8).

There are pointers here in this text to that same truth, but what's striking about these verses in Luke 7 is that here we actually see Jesus marveling. We get a look at the "Oh!" of Jesus' soul, which is pretty awesome considering that Jesus spoke the universe into existence and even at this second is holding everything together. This text is about how to make Jesus marvel. And we learn here that what makes Jesus marvel is faith: "⁹When 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*.'" Faith excites Jesus.

We see this throughout Luke: in the story about the men who lowered their paralyzed friend through the roof to get to Jesus: "²⁰And when he saw their faith, he said, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.'" Later in this chapter, of the sinful woman who fell humbly at Jesus' feet: "⁵⁰Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'" When the disciples are in a panic on the sea and wake Jesus up because of the raging storm: "²⁵He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' And there are many more.

The presence, or absence of, faith in a person is evidently a matter of great importance to Jesus. So I want us to consider what this passage in Luke 7 contributes to our understanding of faith: where it comes from, what it results in, and what it is.

Where Faith Comes From

First, where does faith come from? The most basic answer to this question is, "from God". Faith is the gift of God: "⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast." As Luke says of Apollos' visit to Achaia in Acts 18, "²⁷When he arrived, he greatly helped those *who through grace had believed.*" Faith is a result of God's grace.

But beyond that most basic answer, I want to dig a bit deeper and think about how God works to bring about that gift of faith, because there are a couple of helpful clues here in the text. We're told here (verse 1ff), that after teaching the people, He entered Capernaum, and a centurion (a Roman military commander, in charge of roughly a hundred men) had a servant who he was very fond of, and that servant was sick and at the point of death. "³When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant."

So, where did this man's faith come from? It's just what Romans 10 tells us, "¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." Yes, it was the gift of God, so that nobody should boast. But his faith came from hearing about Jesus: "When the centurion *heard about Jesus...*" It came from knowledge about Jesus that had been passed on to him from other people. Let's ponder this briefly, because there are significant implications for how we think about faith.

Blind Faith is Not Biblical Faith

First, the kind of faith that Jesus marvels at is not ignorant faith. Say you have \$10,000 cash in a briefcase and you're on your way to deposit it at TD Bank, and you remember you have a very important appointment that you'll miss if you make the deposit. So you approach a stranger on the street and say, "There's \$10,000 here in cash, here's my account number, please go to TD bank and make the deposit for me." He says, "Are you serious? Why are you trusting me with that kind of money?" And you say, "No reason; I just do." Is this stranger on the street going to feel honored? He won't be complemented or honored, if you have no reason to trust him.

Let's say instead the conversation goes like this: he says, "Why are you trusting me with this?" And you say, "I know you don't know me, but we work in the same building, and I have been watching you for a year. I see how you fill out your time cards, the way you work with integrity, I've made some contacts and I know how you treat your family and your neighbors. I know you well; you'll make the deposit." How does he feel? He'll be honored. Without knowledge of why we're trusting, the one we're trusting isn't honored.

So if you lack faith, use the means God has given to know Him, the Bible. ¹⁰"And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O LORD, have not forsaken those who seek you." And we know Him through His Word; use it every day to "fight the fight of faith"! Nourish your faith, kindle it afresh, by putting the knowledge of Him gleaned from the Bible into your soul over and over and over again.

Exhort One Another

But the centurion didn't have a Bible. He didn't hear about Jesus by stopping into the local Barnes & Noble, grabbing the latest Carson or Piper book on Jesus and sipping a latte. If he heard about Jesus, he must have heard about Jesus from other people. So not only is the Bible essential in the fight of faith, but so is the Christian community:

"¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Sin is deceitful; the danger of falling into unbelief is real, and we believers should be so vigilant in not allowing that to happen that we get in each other's lives, every day, exhorting one another with the truth of God that protects us from sin's deceitfulness. These are foundational verses to the way we conceive of ministry at JCF. Unbelief is the great enemy of the Christian life, and belief is not automatic; you don't just drift naturally into a deep, robust faith in Jesus. So we are given by God to one another to exhort each other in this every day. Are you in a web of relationships where that happens "every day"? As you fight the fight of faith, share with others what He's showing you!

What Faith Results In

Secondly, what does faith result in, or lead to? This is a small point in the text, but since it's a very significant point biblically in understanding the nature of true faith, it's worth touching on briefly. What I'm wanting to communicate here is that faith results in works. Faith is not just mental assent to some information about Jesus, which leaves our lives unchanged. Faith makes a demonstrable impact on what we do, so that when real faith is there, it leads to our doing things because of that faith. This is a big point in Hebrews 11.

We see it here with the centurion. He had heard about Jesus, faith was born in his heart, and it led him to *do* something: "³When the centurion heard about Jesus, *he sent to him elders of the Jews*, asking him to come and heal his servant." His faith in Jesus was demonstrated by his actions. And that is true of all genuine faith; real faith works. "¹⁸I will show you my faith by my works." If you want to see what a person really believes about God, you don't just listen to their statement of

faith, but you watch how they live, because what you really believe about God gets revealed in the way you are living.

I am regularly reminding my children of this. They're praying every day, "Father, help me to be good to my mommy and daddy, help me to not push, and to be kind to my sister..." I am trying to stress to them over and over that we won't become good by trying to be good. We'll do good when we believe good, that is, believe the truth about God. Saying over and over to God, "Lord, help me to not do this..." is not the way God means for you to wage war against sin, because at root all sin flows from a lack of faith.

This is so because underneath every act or attitude of sin is a failure, in the moment, to trust in the truth of who God is, what He has done in Christ, and what He promises to do for those who are in Christ by faith. If you're living in anxiety, what are you really believing about God? You might say that you believe He's good and wise and all-powerful, but your life is showing that while you might know those things, you're not believing them in the moment, because your works show what you're believing in.

So that's the second point: faith leads to doing, so that by taking an honest look at the way you are living, the choices you're making, the way you're spending your time and money, you can discover what you really believe about God, regardless of your words.

What Faith Is

Finally, what exactly is faith. We've seen where it comes from and what it leads to, but what is its essence? The standard biblical definition is found in Hebrews 11:1, "¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." So faith is an assurance, a strong confidence and conviction, of a good that is to come. But that only helps so much. Assured of what? A strong confidence in what? Based on this text, we can say that the centurion's

faith was the assurance that Jesus has divine authority, and that He will use that authority to do us good despite our unworthiness.

Divine Authority

First, he is confident that Jesus has divine authority. ⁷"...Say the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it.'" As a Roman centurion, this man understood how the chain of authority worked. In the Roman military system, ultimate authority belonged to the emperor, and was delegated on down through the military hierarchy. So when a centurion gave a command to one of his foot soldiers, as far as that foot soldier was concerned, it was as though the emperor himself was speaking.

And this man understood, he believed, that just as when he spoke to his soldier, Rome was speaking, so when Jesus speaks, it is God speaking. He believed that Jesus had that kind of authority. Authority is the right and power to have your subordinates do what you tell them to do. And Jesus has *all* authority, in heaven and on earth. Everyone and everything (including sickness) is subordinate to Jesus. His wish is creation's command! There are no maverick molecules!

Gracious Authority

But there is not only a confident assurance that Jesus has authority, but that He will use that authority to do good. Faith leads the centurion to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant (v.3). But on what basis does the centurion have this assurance? On what grounds does Jesus use His authority to bless? The delegation of Jewish elders sent by the centurion had their opinion: ⁴"When they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.""

They come thinking Jesus' blessing comes on the basis of human merit and work. He was a good guy, he had a lot going for him.

The Jewish elders thought this man was worthy of receiving Jesus' healing power in his life...but the centurion knew he wasn't. As Jesus is on His way, He sends a second delegation: "⁶Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.

⁷Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed." The elders are saying, "He's good and worthy, you owe him. He deserves this." The centurion disagrees; he says, "No, I'm not worthy." But notice that he seems to be thinking with a totally different paradigm than the Jews.

If he was thinking along the same lines as the elders, you might expect him to say, "No, I'm not worthy of being in the same place as you, so I withdraw my request. You shouldn't bless someone like me." But what He says is astounding; instead of saying, "I'm worthy, do what I ask," or, "I'm not worthy, don't do what I ask" (that's the elders' paradigm for gaining the blessing of God), he says, "I'm nothing, I don't even deserve to be in the same room as you, so would you do what I ask and heal my servant."

A Greater Centurion

This makes no sense, unless there is another paradigm for how to relate to God. He's saying, "I know I'm unworthy, and you're all-worthy, but please bring your healing power into my life on some other basis than my moral virtue and worthiness." And this faith that thrills Jesus. The Jewish elders don't get it, but the centurion does. Faith is transferring your trust from yourself to Jesus. And the power of Jesus comes into his life (v.10), not on the basis of his works or his worthiness, but on the basis of...what? On the basis of the work of a greater centurion.

We know from history that "centurions were the military backbone of the Roman Empire. Unlike the senior officers, they went over the wall

with their troops." They would go into battle. The Roman historian Polybius wrote that the Romans employed as centurions: "Only men who can command, steady in action and reliable...when hard pressed they must be ready to hold their ground and die at their posts." This sounds like Jesus, doesn't it?

Jesus is the warrior doing battle with Satan, sin and death. He leads not just a hundred, but a multitude of heavenly hosts, and in His incarnation, He "went over the wall" and got into the battle with us, holding His ground and dying at His post as a substitute for unworthy sinners, bearing the condemnation and punishment that we richly deserved. Because of Jesus alone, wretched sinners can be transformed into beloved children, and come boldly to the throne of God confident of His blessing instead of reproach:

"¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

That's the basis on which the centurion could make his appeal to Jesus. What is faith? It is the heartfelt confidence that because of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, the all-authoritative Lord and King of the universe is now and will forever be 100% for us, though all we deserve from Him is burning fury and indignation.

Can you see how faith would be transforming? If you believed in every moment that the all-authoritative King of kings was totally committed to your everlasting good, and was guiding and governing every single detail of your life to pour love and joy and blessing into your life, would you not be unshakable? And so we fight the fight of faith, which is simply to believe that in the midst of circumstances and feelings that seem to contradict it, longing for the day when He comes again and the

fight will be over because we finally see Him face to face. And because Jesus died and rose, we know our faith is not in vain.

So I want to close with this: if Jesus is so serious about faith, if the presence of it so thrills Him and if the absence of it so grieves Him, then I think it would be foolish for us to rush out of here right now without taking stock of where we are and what's going on in our hearts as it pertains to faith. Is there an area in which I've refused to trust Him? Is there an area where God has said, "This is an issue," and you've responded, "I can't do that?" Maybe it's a sin you need to confess, or a relationship you need to repair, or a direction you need to pursue. He's for your good, right? His commands and direction are always about your joy, that's what faith embraces.

I just want you to take a second here to say, "Ok Lord, where have I just refused? Where have I said I'm not going to do that? Where have I said that's just not an area of my life I'm going to trust You with? Let's pray, and ask God to increase our faith, make it stronger, that He would help our unbelief.