

The Centurion's Faith: Authority, Belief, and the Hard Truth

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References: **Luke 7; Matthew 8**, 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Luke 7:1-10; Matthew 8:5-13; John 3:15-18; Mark 16:14-16

The Foundation of Scripture

Good evening. Please turn with me to 2 Timothy chapter 3. 2 Timothy chapter 3. And while you're turning there, I'd just like to give my thanks to Harold for inviting me to come speak this evening. 2 Timothy chapter 3, and we'll start at verse 15. 2 Timothy chapter 3, starting at verse 15.

[2 Timothy 3:15-17 NKJV]

¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And we'll stop there.

And my topic this evening is going to be—we're going to look at two different accounts of the same story in the Gospels, but just in a way of setting a foundation. I want to just focus here on verse 16, right? All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, right? That's the key here. **All** Scripture is given by God, right? So in believing Scripture, you believe that **all** Scripture is given by God, therefore we cannot pick and choose to be like, "Well, I like this twenty percent, but I don't like that ten percent. I like this, and I don't like that." You've got to take it as a whole. And as it's given by God, therefore everything is there for a reason. Everything is there, peace, perfect, and there are no mistakes, right? So just keep that, keep that in the back of your head, and we will turn to one of our two main passages, which is the Gospel of Luke chapter 7. The Gospel of Luke chapter 7.

And before I go any further, I'm just going to have a quick word of prayer.

"I love You, God, and Your heavenly Father, Lord, I thank You for giving me the opportunity and the privilege to speak here at 16th this evening, Lord. I pray that You will be with me and guide me in everything that I say, Lord, and that if I say anything that is not of You, that You will strike it immediately from everyone's mind, Lord, in the precious and holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen. Amen."

Gospel of Luke chapter 7, starting in verse 1.

[Luke 7:1-10 NKJV]

¹ Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. ² And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. ³ So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, ⁵ "for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue."

⁶ Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. ⁷ Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ For I also am a man placed under authority, having 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."

⁹ When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" ¹⁰ And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.

And we'll stop there.

The Worth of a Servant

And we're going to go through this portion a little quickly. Then we will turn to Matthew chapter 8 and go through the second account, and then we'll do some comparing of the two accounts. But I want to point out a couple of interesting things here.

Firstly—and this was not something that I myself realized; I was reading Warren Henderson's book... no, not Warren, Bill McDonald's commentary, and he mentioned this. In verse 2, we see here, the centurion is sending for healing for his servant. This is the only documented time in Scripture that someone comes to the Lord Jesus beseeching for the healing of a servant, which is interesting, right? Because there were a lot of Jews that had servants. There were a lot of other Gentiles that had servants. But this is the only time that a centurion, or that someone comes for a servant—he's a Roman soldier—for his servant. It's interesting. It's an interesting side note.

But we see that the centurion's servant was sick and he was ready to die. And in this portion, it doesn't elaborate on the illness, just that he was close to death, right? So the centurion, when he hears of the Lord Jesus, he sends unto the elders of the Jews in this, which is also a very interesting thing, because the elders of the Jews, generally speaking, didn't like the Lord Jesus, right?

But because this centurion, as it said in verse 5, had built them a synagogue, they had gotten some material gain out of this centurion, and he'd obviously been giving money and protection to them. They didn't want to ruin that. So even though, generally speaking, as you see in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts, the Jewish leaders weren't overly fond of the Lord Jesus in general, in this situation, they suck it up and they go. Or possibly some of them may have been perfectly fine with it; it doesn't really state. Just in general, the Jewish elders weren't overly fond of Him. But in this case, again, because of the centurion's material gain that they had given—the practical gifts that he had given them, not wanting to lose that—they go and they see the Lord Jesus, asking Him to come.

When they do, in verse 4, you see they say "that he was worthy for whom he should do this, for he loves our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue." It's interesting because the Lord Jesus several times specifically states that He did not come to save the righteous but to call sinners, right? So, what does being worthy of healing because he built a synagogue mean? Great, like, he's got wealth and a position, but that had nothing to do with why the Lord Jesus went to heal the servant, right? It shows the difference between what God sees and what man sees, right? Man sees the outside. "He's worthy." He doesn't—well, from, you know, from an earthly standpoint, we consider good works, you know, "He built a synagogue. He's nice to us." Possibly he gives other money—it doesn't state that—but he did, you know, and that's what they see on the outside, but God sees on the inside. And the worth that the Lord Jesus saw in the centurion had nothing to do with the fact that he had built a synagogue. We'll see that later on when we get down to it.

An Understanding of Authority

So then, this is verse 6, the Lord Jesus goes with them. And obviously, the centurion had set out sentries, using the military parlance, watching for this, because when the Lord Jesus gets to a certain distance, we see here that he sent friends. So first he sent the Jewish elders, then he sent his own friends. And he says, you know, this is very interesting because, again, the Jewish elders' argument was, "He is worthy because he's built us a synagogue." But the centurion in his own mind says, "I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof." So the centurion, he recognizes... actually, we'll carry on and then I'll go into my explanation.

"For neither thought I myself worthy to come unto Thee, but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he doeth it."

So we see the centurion. So, for those of you that don't know, a Roman centurion is a military rank. It is a man who in this time would be under, or would command, roughly one hundred men. Hence "centurion"—it's the Roman word for a hundred. So he would command one hundred men, roughly. But he would be under the command of other superior officers, right? So that's why he says here he understands authority. He understands his place in authority.

So he has men under him, and he can say to one soldier, "Go do this," and the soldier goes: "Go have a patrol there. Take twenty men and go patrol up to that village, and then come back on the highway." And they go do it. And he has servants, and he says to one, "Clean the house," and he says to another one, "Cook dinner," and he says to another one, "I'm having a party this evening or next Friday. I need you to do all the shopping for it, and we're going to have this menu, and we're going to have this many people, and we need to clean the house, and we need extra tables, and we need to get the invitations out to people, et cetera." And the servants go and do it.

So he understands that, but he also understands that he is under authority because when his boss comes to him and says, "I need you to organize patrols to this town and that town and this town and that town, and then I need you to go over there and get fifty new recruits and bring them over to this place, and then I need you to go do that other thing," he goes and does it, or he orders his people to do it. He understands his place in authority, and he recognizes, unlike the Jewish leaders, the Lord Jesus has power to heal. Not only does He have power to heal, He has power to heal with the spoken word without ever having to be present to the person that He is healing. Because we see here in verses 6 and 7, "I am not

worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof, but say in a word"—this is the end of verse 7 now—"say in a word and my servant shall be healed."

So he recognizes that the Lord Jesus is God and has power over sickness and disease, and that He can, with a word, heal his servant without ever actually having to see the servant or even know specifically what is wrong with the servant. He recognizes that. And when we get to verse 9 now, we see that when Jesus heard these things, He marvels. And He turns to the people that are following and says, "I say to you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Which is an indictment on Israel, given that if they had the Old Testament at this point, they had, every year, they recited the story of the Passover. Every time at the synagogue, they're constantly reading through the Old Testament scriptures. And you see in the Old Testament scriptures how God was always faithful to them. They would sin, they would fall away, they would repent. God would bring them out of captivity, then they would sin. They'd get sent into captivity, or someone would conquer them. They would repent, they would get delivered, and so on and so forth. It happens quite a lot if you read through the Old Testament. And they had all those examples. And then they also had the examples of the Lord Jesus healing people before this and doing other miracles, and yet they did not have the faith that He could—the same faith as this centurion—because they did not recognize that He was God and had authority over everything, right?

And then in verse 10, we see here that those that were sent, when they returned to the house, they found the servant whole that had been sick. So the Lord Jesus spoke, and in that instant, the power of God was used to heal the servant to a state where he was probably healthier than he'd ever been in his entire life, right? At that moment, right?

Now, let us turn to Matthew. Matthew chapter 8, and we will get a different account of the same story. Keeping in mind that all Scripture is God-breathed, and so there are no mistakes and/or contradictions. Just keep that, keep that in the back of your brain. Matthew chapter 8, starting in verse 5.

[Matthew 8:5-13 NKJV]

⁵ Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, ⁶ saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." ⁷ And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

⁸ The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I also

am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, "Go," and he goes; and to another, "Come," and he comes; and to my servant, "Do this," and he does it."

¹⁰ When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" ¹¹ And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour.

And we'll stop there. And we'll go back to the beginning of this portion, which is verse 5.

Reconciling the Accounts

Now we see here, this is the same story told from a slightly different perspective because the different Gospels portray the Lord Jesus in a different light, and so they emphasize different parts of the same stories. And we see in verse 5, we already see here there's something that's different from the portrayal in Luke. So at the beginning, Jesus enters into Capernaum. That's the same in both passages. We see here, "there came unto Him a centurion beseeching Him."

Now, we see Luke first has the elders of the Jews and then it's the centurion's friends. Now, that appears to be a contradiction, right? But it's not, right? Now, there are two different explanations for this, right? Now, I firmly believe that what appears to be contradictions in Scripture is just something that requires more study, and God will eventually reveal why it is not a contradiction. Now, there's two different explanations for this that work.

Now, the first one is that the centurion actually gives it to you in verse 9, when he explains that he's a man under authority, and he sends—he has soldiers that go do this, and he has servants that he tells to do that, and his boss tells them to do something, right? So, the first thing is he could have, if he sent a servant or some friends to speak on his behalf, it is—this is essentially like he went and did it himself because they're speaking for him, but they're saying specific things that they're told to say, all right? So, it is essentially like he went and said it himself. The other explanation is he first sent the elders of the Jews, then the friends, and then he himself eventually went out and spoke to the Lord at some point. Either way, it doesn't change the story, but it also doesn't contradict itself, right?

We also get in verse 6 some more information. The servant was sick with the palsy, "grievously tormented." So, that was a very violent and painful paralysis that, if you combine the two, was leading him to die, right? And again, you could tell the centurion really cares for this particular servant. It doesn't elaborate on why, just that he cares for this particular servant.

Now, verse 7, "Jesus saith unto him, 'I will come and heal him.'" In Luke's portrayal, that is omitted, but it is implied when the Lord Jesus is heading to the house to heal the servant, right?

And then we get verse 8, and this is the interesting part. So the centurion answers and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof, but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this man, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he doeth it."

That is word for word the same as in Luke, right? That is the crux of this passage—well, one of the two main points of this passage—and that is word for word identical. So again, we see the centurion recognizes authority when he sees it, knows that the Lord Jesus has the authority to heal his servant, knows that the Lord Jesus just needs to speak. He doesn't have to touch. He doesn't have to do some sort of weird magic incantation. He doesn't have to wave His hands around. He just has to speak. He doesn't even have to see the centurion. He just has to speak, because he recognizes that if you have the power to heal, the divine power to heal, that's all you need to do it, right? Okay?

The Warning of Outer Darkness

Now we get to verse 10, and in this version of the story, there is more. The Lord Jesus says more things. And this is where we get to the lesson for us, one of the lessons for us. So verse 10, "When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to them that followed, 'Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.'" So again, that's the same as in Luke's portrayal.

But now we have more. And this is a very poignant and hard statement that comes next: "And I say unto you that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

This is a greater indictment and an elaboration on the indictment of, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel," is that many will come from the east and west—so, that is

Gentiles, those that are not Jews, right?—and they will sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, which is the forefathers of the Jewish race, in the kingdom of heaven, right? And those are people that all Jews would recognize as being in the kingdom of heaven, right? So, we see that many will come from the east and the west to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out. So, these are the Jews that just paid lip service to Judaism and following the Old Testament laws and following God's commands. They did it out of rote. They did it because everybody else did it. They did it for power and prestige and influence. A lot of Jewish leaders were like that. There was no genuine faith. There was no genuine belief there. It was, "This is a way for me to get power and prestige." And they will be cast out into outer darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

That is the lake of fire, the second death, the final judgment. And when you're in there, you don't get out, and that will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. So that will be, as my dad likes to describe it, a lake of fire, moaning your own situation and cursing God for putting you there, even though you're the one that put yourself there, and you will never leave. It is eternal torment that will never end, right? That's what that is. And this is saying to the Jews at the time that there are many Jews that will end up there. They may have gone to the temple multiple times a year for sacrifices, they may have done all the various sacrifices as they were supposed to do—a lot of priests, a lot of Levites—but they didn't actually have any faith. They just sort of did it by rote. Or many Jews that didn't do it, right? They're like, "I don't need to worry about that. It doesn't matter," and they just fell away, right? That's what ends up happening to them.

And that's also a lesson for us, because that can also be applied to us today, in that instead of "the children of the kingdom," it can also be described as those that grow up in Christian houses, those that have Christian parents, those that grow up in Christian families and are exposed to Christian living and to the Scripture, and they go to church when they're young, and then they fall away because they don't get saved, right? It's the same thing, right? If you're not truly saved, you will end up in the lake of fire, and it is a horrible place, and you will never leave it, right?

We'll come back to that in a minute, but I just want to tie up verse 13 here: "And Jesus said unto the centurion, 'Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.' And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour." As soon as the Lord Jesus said, "So be it done unto thee," as soon as He finished saying that, that was when the centurion's servant was healed. That was when He exercised His divine power and healed the centurion's servant because of

the faith—because the centurion believed that He could do it, and He honored that faith and did it.

The Reality of Condemnation

Now, I'm going to close with two passages. First one is a very, very well-known passage in John chapter 3, just to tie this all together. John chapter 3, and we're going to start at verse 15. John chapter 3 and verse 15.

[John 3:15-18 NKJV]

¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. ¹⁸ "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

So we'll stop there. Okay.

Something actually occurred to me this evening is that we quote John 3:16 a lot, and we tend to focus on the "whosoever believeth in Him," which is correct. That is good. But we tend to not focus on what happens if you say no. We tend to not read verses 17 and 18 the same, and not also note here in verse 18 that "He that believeth on Him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already." We don't tend to focus on that as much, right, when we preach the gospel.

And then, the last verse that will tie this all together is another one that I haven't heard spoken on, I don't think in my entire life, and my dad was telling me he hasn't heard this spoken on much: the Gospel of Mark, chapter 16. Gospel of Mark, chapter 16, and we'll break into verse 14. Gospel of Mark, chapter 16, and we'll start at verse 14.

[Mark 16:14-16 NKJV]

¹⁴ Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. ¹⁵ And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach

the gospel to every creature. ¹⁶ He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

And we'll stop there.

Haven't heard that verse quoted much, because we tend to not like to focus too much on what the world would call the negative, but what I'm calling—it's the truth, but it's the hard truth. We don't always like to focus on the hard truth; we like to focus on the good stuff, which is fair enough, but you've got to preach the whole thing.

Salvation is an all-or-nothing proposition. There's no gray area, there's no struggle, there's no... you know, straddling the fence, there's no walking a line. You're either saved or you're not. That's what it is, right? And if you're not saved, you're damned, right? So, as we saw in Matthew 8 and Luke 7, but in Matthew 8 specifically, if you do not have faith in the Lord Jesus, you will be damned, and you will end up cast out into outer darkness where there is the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

Application: Faith and Specificity in Prayer

So, I'm going to summarize because there's two main points here.

We see the faith, right? Do we have the faith in God? We've just been praying for many various needs a little earlier this evening, some of which I have heard before when I have been here, some of which are new to me. And I'm only here three or four times a year, so it's every sort of three-and-a-half-ish months, so I, you know, don't hear things all the time, right? And I have been to many prayer meetings in my time, and I have heard many things prayed for.

Now, the real—the question is, do we have the faith, like the centurion had the faith, that God will actually do what we're asking Him to do, right? Do we actually have the faith that He will do that, or are we just sort of doing things like the religious leaders would do, and just sort of saying it because we're at a prayer meeting and we should—we should be saying something at a prayer meeting, right? If you do not have faith, the prayer means nothing, right?

Just like—it's so—that that is an application for those that are saved, right? Do you have the faith that when you ask the Lord Jesus to heal you, that He will actually do it? Or if you ask that He will help you pass your exam, that He'll actually do it? Or that He will find you a tenant for your basement suite, or that He will help you with work-related issues, or, you

know, whatever you're—whatever you need help with, that He will actually do it? Or are you just sort of saying it because that's what we do: we pray, but are we doing it?

The other thing with prayer is: be very specific, right? Because if you pray for something in general, you might get a very specific answer and not realize it, right? If you just ask for help in a general sense, you may get help on something, but you might not notice it because you've asked for something in general. Whereas, if you ask for something very specific, you tend to notice the answers more. God is great, and God will answer prayer. And if you ask for help, He will help you. But what He chooses to help you on and what you want help on might not be the same thing, and as such, you might not notice it, and you might get frustrated or worried because you're not being specific about your prayer requests.

So you need to be specific with your prayer requests and have the faith that the God that created the universe is more than capable of dealing with whatever little tiny problem we have, right? It might seem massive to us, but in God's scale of things, it's not. It's—it's really easy for Him to deal with, right?

And the other thing is, if you are not saved, you will end up in outer darkness. There is no middle ground. There is no, you know, second chance, in that you have until you die or the Rapture happens, whichever happens first, right, to get saved. If you miss that cutoff, there's no second chance for you, right? And if you are not saved, you will end up in outer darkness, in the lake of fire, and you will be damned for all eternity. It is not a pleasant thought.

So, I'll just close with this: you have—you have one choice, right? You can either be saved or not, right? So the choice is up to you. I know which one I have picked. What have you picked?

I'm just going to close on a word of prayer.

"Lord, our God and heavenly Father, Lord, I thank You for the example of the Roman centurion, Lord, and his faith, Lord. And I pray, Lord, that You will be with all of us here, whether here in person or on Zoom, or any others that will hear this message in whatever way it is spoken to, Lord, and that they will take into heart the example, Lord, and that we do have the faith and recognize Your authority, and that You do have authority over everything and You can and will act, Lord, and that You will do what You say You're going to do. And that when we ask You for things and have faith that You will do them, that You do do them, Lord. And I also pray, Lord, if there are any here that are not saved, Lord, that You make their lives miserable and bring them under a conviction of sin until they do get saved, Lord. And I pray, Lord, that You will bring those of us that are here safely to our various destinations this evening, and those that are away, bring them safely back to be with those

that meet here at 16th in the near future, Lord. In the precious, holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen."