

**Lesson: Developing Strong Faith: The Centurion**

**Biblical Passage**

Luke 7:1-10

**Supporting Passage**

Matthew 8:5-13

**Memory Verse**

Hebrews 11:1

**Biblical Truth**

Faith is trusting that God can work in any situation regardless of how things look on the surface.

**Context**

Jesus traveled north along the Sea of Galilee and entered the city of Capernaum. There, He was approached by Jewish elders on behalf of a Roman centurion whose servant was about to die. The Jews asked Jesus to go and make the servant well. As a result of the centurion's faith, Jesus healed the servant and remarked about the Gentile's faith.

**Investigation**

Jesus' presence always seemed to draw attention. People were amazed at Jesus' teachings and His miracles; many hoped He might meet some desperate need. They also speculated as to whether He might be the Lord's Messiah. In Capernaum, a Roman centurion who had earned the respect of many Jews heard about Jesus. He questioned whether Jesus could save the life of his servant, who was deathly ill.

Because the slave meant so much to him, the centurion sent some of the Jewish elders to Jesus to request His help. Since the centurion was a strong supporter of the synagogue, they agreed to help and delivered the centurion's note to Jesus. Because of the centurion's faith, Jesus healed the servant and used the centurion's faith as an example for His followers.

**Importance**

The centurion's faith in Jesus' authority over all things exemplifies the truth that Salvation is by Faith Alone. Without meeting Jesus in person, the centurion expressed his complete faith in Him. Learners who believe what the Bible teaches about Jesus can confidently place their trust in Him, receive salvation and spiritual renewal, experience abundant life on earth as one of His children, and live eternally in His presence in heaven.

This passage also demonstrates that Jesus is God and Savior. He has the authority to heal physically and spiritually anyone who turns to Him in faith.

**Interpretation**

**Luke 7:1** When Jesus had finished teaching the crowd, He traveled to Capernaum, a city on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Several of the disciples were from Capernaum, which served as the home base for Jesus when He began His ministry. Capernaum was an important city in Galilee, possibly located near a popular east-west trade route. It was also home to a military outpost.

The word translated "finished" can also be translated as "fulfilled." Luke used this to show the progression of Jesus' ministry. "All this" refers to His teaching recorded in Luke 6:17-49. Luke also recorded that Jesus taught "in the hearing of the people" to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the accounts of several witnesses.

**Luke 7:2-3** Luke introduced two people who played a significant role in Jesus' ministry: a "centurion," who was a Gentile, and his "servant," or slave. A centurion was an officer in the Roman army who was over a company of a hundred men. This centurion would have been a member of Herod Antipas' army.

Although not a Jew, the centurion may have been a God-fearer. Some who were not Jews believed in the Lord God and lived according to His laws, but chose not to become full members of the Jewish covenant.

The centurion was concerned about the life of his slave, who was sick to the point of death. In the parallel account, the Gospel of Matthew describes the slave as "paralyzed and in terrible suffering" (Matthew 8:6). The centurion highly valued the slave. At that time, slaves had no rights and usually were valued as nothing more than property. However, the centurion treated his slave more like a son than a servant. This may have been because he was a valuable worker, or it may have been because the slave had become a friend to the master. It was not unheard of in the first century Roman Empire for a personal friendship to develop between a slave and his master.

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The centurion had “heard of” Jesus. Even in ancient times, the news of someone who could drive out evil spirits and heal diseases spread quickly. The centurion might even have been in the crowd listening to Jesus’ teaching. Whatever the case, in the midst of a desperate situation with his servant, the centurion sought Jesus’ help.

He sent a delegation of Jewish men to Jesus. While Luke identified the men as a group of “elders” (men who were highly respected), Matthew recorded that the centurion himself went to ask Jesus to “*heal*” his servant (Matthew 8:5). These two accounts are not contradictory; Luke simply emphasized the elders’ involvement on behalf of the military officer. Ultimately, the issue of how he carried out his communication is of little importance. The elders were probably highly respected citizens of the city rather than leaders in the Jewish synagogue.

**Luke 7:4–5** The Jewish elders attempted to persuade Jesus to help the centurion. The phrase “pleaded earnestly” indicates a persistent appeal for Jesus to answer the request soon. Time was of the essence. They described the military officer as a man worthy of Jesus’ attention and help, a patron who had shown a high regard for the Jews by building them a synagogue. In the first century, Gentiles could contribute to the development and upkeep of Jewish synagogues. Because a non-Jew did such a thing for the Jewish people, the Jews subsequently held the officer in high regard.

**Luke 7:6–8** Jesus traveled with the Jewish elders to the centurion’s home. As they approached, the centurion sent a second group with another message. Notice the contrasts in the two conversations. The first delegation was a group of Jewish elders who promoted the centurion’s high standing among the Jews (v. 4). They described the centurion as a man worthy of Jesus’ attention. The second was a group of friends who passed along his direct message of unworthiness (vv. 6–8). The centurion may have known that under Jewish Law Jesus would be ceremonially unclean if He entered the home of a Gentile. But it was more likely that his humility was due to recognition of who Jesus was.

The centurion expressed his faith that Jesus only needed to “say the word” in order for his servant to “be *healed*.” Not wanting to bother Jesus, the centurion hoped He might pause briefly just to say a healing word before moving on to matters more worthy of His attention.

The centurion then expressed a keen understanding of Jesus’ authority. Because of his own authority as a military officer, the centurion knew that the commands of one in authority in the Roman army would be carried out without discussion. But he also knew that Jesus’ authority was far greater than his as a representative of the Roman government. When the centurion called himself a “man under authority,” it may have been an indication that he believed that Jesus was far more than a man and was indeed the Christ.

**Luke 7:9–10** Jesus was more than just impressed with the faith of this centurion. He was “*amazed*” at this Gentile’s *faith*. It went far beyond anything He had found in the Jewish people. Though the Jews were God’s chosen people, as a whole they refused to acknowledge Jesus’ authority. But this Gentile recognized Jesus’ power to perform a miracle—even at a distance. While many Jews believed in Jesus after seeing one of His miracles, this non-Jew believed before seeing Him do anything. Jesus thus healed the servant. The centurion’s friends discovered that the servant had been healed when they returned to the house.

This event shows that Jesus was concerned not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. As Isaiah prophesied, Jesus came as “a light for the Gentiles” to “bring God’s salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6).

### Implications

Although the centurion knew Jesus only by what he had heard about Him, his faith in Jesus was complete. Because Salvation is by Faith Alone, accepting that Jesus, the only Son of God, has full authority over all aspects of life is the first step in a lifelong journey of faith.

Many adults today find their faith at a standstill. They realize that trusting Jesus for salvation is the first step toward spiritual health. Even as they acknowledge the need to grow in their faith, they may struggle with the challenges of integrating faith into every part of life. When things are going great, they might keep pushing on without really thinking about their faith. But when life comes crashing in, they cry out for help. When learners can grab hold of the idea that our faith in Christ informs every decision, faith becomes stronger. We can experience the benefit of a “great faith” like the centurion experienced. Until believers understand the importance of complete faith in Christ, many rewarding experiences will be missed.

Change becomes more difficult as we get older. Learners who have lived according to their own terms may find it difficult to trust Jesus in all things; but it can be done. Sharing with others the struggles we have in our faith can create the opportunity to find encouragement as well as accountability. When we, like the centurion, trust Jesus completely, our faith will be pleasing to God.

- Is your faith active for today’s challenges, or are you only trusting Christ with eternity?
- What strengthens your faith? Is Christ’s authority a source of strength for your faith? Why or why not?
- How is your faith affected when Christ doesn’t answer your prayers the way you wanted or expected Him to? Page: 2