

# THE BELIEVING CENTURION

Daryl and Felicia were sitting on the back patio while they enjoyed a fire at their new home. They talked about their day at work and all the things they were enjoying about a new neighborhood.

As they spoke, Felicia noticed a dim light coming from across the fence. Daryl was curious enough to peer over, and he saw a young man sitting alone and on his phone, seated in a chair.

“You say anything?” Felicia whispered in a hushed tone.

“Couldn’t without startling him,” said Daryl. “I think that’s the house the landlord mentioned with the nice neighbors.”

The next day Daryl spotted his chance at an introduction when the same teen was out at the mailbox.

“Nice to meet you! We just moved in next door,” he said with an outstretched hand. “I’m Daryl. What’s your name?”

“Hrudvick,” mumbled the boy.

“Hrudvick,” Daryl repeated. “Hey, I noticed you were outside last night!”

The boy looked surprised, but he spoke in a low tone. “I was reading the Bible. My family wouldn’t like it.”

“You’re kidding!” said Daryl with a curious look. Then he said a little quieter, “Hey, my wife and I are Christians. If you are ever looking for a group to read with, I know the perfect place. Actually we lead a Bible study.”

**1 What does it mean to have faith?**

**2 What is your own story of faith in an unexpected place or from an unexpected person?**

<sup>5</sup> And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, <sup>6</sup> And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

<sup>7</sup> And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

<sup>8</sup> The centurion answered 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. <sup>9</sup> For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

<sup>5</sup> When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. <sup>6</sup> “Lord,” he said, “my servant lies at home paralyzed, suffering terribly.”

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, “Shall I come and heal him?”

<sup>8</sup> The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>9</sup> For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

## A Man of Authority

What does anyone “deserve” from Jesus? While Jesus walked the earth, not every person met Him or experienced His healing touch. Not every person had a life transformed by an encounter with the Son of God.

Matthew tells us about a person who doesn’t deserve attention from Jesus. The man is a centurion—a Roman officer and outsider to “the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). Roman soldiers were an occupying military force, sometimes responsible for heinous treatment of Jews. It is hard to imagine a person less worthy of attention from the Jewish Messiah who inherits David’s throne.

But the centurion has a unique approach. For one thing, he gives respect to Jesus, even calls Him “Lord” (Matt. 8:6). That doesn’t fit what we anticipate a Roman officer to say. Immediately we notice another surprising detail: this powerful man is not seeking attention for himself at all. He is asking Jesus to pay attention to another person, one with lower social standing. What sent this centurion to Jesus is his servant’s suffering, physical pain that has reached a

breaking point. The centurion is showing a selfless concern for others, which is conduct in keeping with Jesus' own words: "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt. 7:12).

Jesus is already sold. He seems ready to get on the road and to pay a visit to the servant in distress. But instead of leading Jesus along in a hurried fashion, the centurion squares himself up to Jesus to suggest an alternative. The commander of Roman soldiers reasons, *Would a high-ranking officer run from place to place to see his orders obeyed? Of course not!* The centurion might not be a Jew, but he knows a thing or two about rank and the way that orders are conveyed. It is Jesus who holds all authority in heaven and on earth (see Matt. 28:18).

The centurion looks upon the Lord of heaven and earth and suggests, "Just say the word, and my servant will be healed" (v. 8). He is confident that whatever Jesus ordains is certain to be followed. He does not need Jesus to visit his home, and he would rather not waste any more of Jesus' precious time. Can you hear the humility behind his thoughts?

With prudent insight, the centurion shows that he is absolutely clear about Jesus' identity and cosmic power. Jesus could merely speak a word, and that would be enough. The world's creation came through the authoritative speech of God, and Jesus is capable of no less. Thus, the person who appeared unworthy of Christ's attention turns out to be someone with great faith.

**1 What is surprising about the way that a centurion decides to approach Jesus?**

**2 What might have happened if the centurion had said, "Sure! Please come"?**

**3 What prepared the centurion to grasp the meaning of Jesus' authority?**

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. <sup>11</sup> I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>12</sup> But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment.

## Examples of Faith

Jesus is looking for faith. It is hard to miss in Matthew’s Gospel. In the Sermon on the Mount, He remarks about tiny faith from those who listen (Matt. 6:30). When tested by storms and crashing waves, Jesus’ own disciples turn out to need more of it (Matt. 8:26; 14:31). And later, Jesus will refuse to perform signs and miracles where faith is lacking (Matt. 13:58). But the first person that Jesus commends for “great faith” is this centurion (Matt. 8:10).

The amazement of Jesus begs an important question: *Who are the ones who should have faith?* Jewish contemporaries would expect religious people—those having studied the Scriptures—to show faith in what God is doing. In contrast, many of the religious leaders organize against Jesus and force Him to warn against following their teaching (Matt. 16:11–12).

Instead of meeting listeners’ expectations, Jesus declares that “many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (v. 11). This imagery draws from the idea of a great feast and messianic banquet to include “all peoples” (Isa. 25:6). But rather than

emphasize the prime place of Israel over the nations, Jesus democratizes the vision, describing “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” as seated at the same table as a greater crowd.

Beginning with the call of Abraham, promises of God are for all who put their faith in Jesus. The patriarchs of Israel will not be shamed to share a common table with Gentiles. In fact, the legacy of Abraham is a legacy of faith! Paul makes a similar point when he says, “Abram believed God [in Greek, *showed faith*], and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Gal. 3:6). And again, “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). By faith, Gentiles come to the banquet with Jesus, even while unbelieving Jews miss the party.

Jesus does not neglect an opportunity to speak a word of warning. He acknowledges a privileged position for Jews, “subjects of the kingdom” (Matt. 8:12). But the warning about *darkness* is, at the same time, a welcome to those who come into the *light*. These concepts are central to Jesus’ preaching ministry: “a light has dawned . . . the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt. 4:16–17). Therefore, the centurion’s faith fulfills the word of Israel’s prophets, who knew that Gentiles would turn to the Jewish Messiah.

Jesus tells the centurion, “Go! Let it be done just as you believed it would.” The power of Jesus’ word accomplishes what it declares. There is no physical touch, no ritual, no further exchange—simply the divine speech of Jesus. The centurion leaves to find that his servant was healed at the very same moment.

**1 Jesus seems to be looking for a certain kind of faith. What kind?**

**2 Do you think that Jesus is harsh in His warning about a life in utter darkness? Why or why not?**

**3 What do you imagine it will be like to feast beside Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?**

## **What Really Amazes Jesus**

Think for a moment about all the ways we might try to puff up our chests to distinguish ourselves. Maybe we try to amaze others by our gifts, status, or abilities. Or, from a Christian perspective, we might find ourselves impressed by great learning, spiritual development, or success in ministry.

But the centurion's example demonstrates that Jesus is looking for faith. Ask yourself, do we try to present ourselves as worthy of God's favor and attention for other reasons? The message is especially encouraging for anyone who feels like an outsider. Perhaps you did not grow up reading Scripture or attending church. Or perhaps you have a past that you try not to bring up in the company of Christian friends. None of that disqualified the centurion. He lacked the right background, education, or religious experience to seem worthy of approaching Jesus. Yet his colorful past and inopportune career made his faith all the more impressive.

It should encourage our own search for faith in unlikely places and from unexpected people. To most of Jesus' followers, a centurion was a person who needed correction. From a strictly logical perspective, anyone involved in the repressive Roman army needed to be put in their place, not affirmed.

But Jesus demonstrates God's willingness to shower unworthy people with grace and attention. In our context, instead of demanding signs and expecting God to work in a visible way, we can look for God's attention at the margins. If we lack the outward signs of "success," we can still show faith through quiet obedience to Jesus' authority. What God is doing is what matters.

**1 If you were to summarize, what does the witness of the centurion teach us?**

**2 What are signs of outward success that might be misleading?**

**3 Where have you spotted God working at the margins and in unexpected places?**

## Grow My Faith

Ask God to bring to mind one area of life where you need the Savior's touch. Is there a broken relationship? A dream for the future? A powerful addiction? A feeling of loss? Whether you feel like your faith is strong or weak, use this week to boldly pray for God to intervene, to show the power of Jesus and to grow your faith.

**My bold request is for God to intervene in this way:**

*(a dream, addiction, feeling of loss, or anything else)*

### Key Text

When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. —Matthew 8:10 KJV

When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith." —Matthew 8:10 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

#### Week of July 6 through July 11

**Mon.** Acts 2:14–21—Peter: Bold Gospel Preacher.

**Tue.** Psalm 34:1–9—I Sought the Lord.

**Wed.** Psalm 34:10–22—The Lord Delivers.

**Thu.** Mark 8:27–33—Peter Misunderstands.

**Fri.** Isaiah 41:8–13—God Will Strengthen and Help.

**Sat.** Mark 14:55–72—Peter Denies Jesus.

**Next Week:** Mark 8:27–29; Luke 22:31–34; John 18:25–27; 21:15–17

*We will talk about God's restorative kindness to us. Where have you been challenged to forgive in the recent past?*