



2nd Sunday of Pentecost
June 23, 2019
Luke 7:1-10

“Do You Have Great Faith?”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! In the name of Jesus, dear friends in Christ,

How much faith do you have? I've been getting to know the drive along I-80 between Cheyenne and Laramie pretty well now. As you all know on I-80 you can drive 75 mph, but not only that, but just before you get to Laramie there's this summit that winds down through the mountains. If you've ever made that trip, you're putting a lot of faith in something. Every time that I've driven that stretch and every time that I've moved my foot from the gas pedal to the brake pedal, I don't think even once have I found myself consciously thinking, "Oh boy! I sure hope these brakes are going to work this time! I sure hope they're going to slow my vehicle down!" Do you do that? As you're driving your car – do you consciously worry whether your brakes are going to actually stop your car or not? I'm going to take a wild guess and say that most of us here don't worry and wonder about that. In fact, we put a lot of trust in the brakes in our car. If I'm traveling with my family and I'm driving 75 mph, I'm trusting my car brakes with my life, the precious lives of my wife and children, and a sizeable investment of our money (our car), right?

You see, we exercise faith in many ways in our lives, everyone does. In fact, everyone is believing in, trusting in, relying on something. Even someone who says, "I have no faith, I don't believe there is a God." You can't disbelieve in God without believing at that same moment just as deeply and fundamentally in something else. If someone doesn't believe in God or in Jesus, it's not that they don't believe or don't have faith, they have faith in something else. Even to say, "There is no God" is an unprovable statement and so it is based on faith, it's a statement of faith. Or to say, I don't believe what the Bible says about creation, evolutionary theory is right, evolutionary theory has never been nor will it ever be proven, so someone has to believe in evolutionary theory. They are basing their entire eternal destiny on that belief. Everyone believes in something. Everyone has faith in something.

What about us? What do you believe in? Thank the Lord that He's worked by the Holy Spirit saving faith in our hearts - whether it be weak or strong- in the Lord Jesus, it's still saving faith. But, our Lord wants us to continue to grow in our faith and trust in Him, he wants us to have great faith in Him. So, one of the things he does is gives us examples in His Word of individuals who had great faith in Him so we can learn from it and imitate their faith. One such example is here in our text. Very rarely, in fact only twice, did Jesus commend someone for having "great faith." One instance is here with this centurion. As we walk through this text let's find out what Great faith is. We're going to see three things: It's unselfish, It has the right object, and it knows the power of words.

Capernaum is the city. It was located in the northern part of Israel, in Galilee. It was located on a rather important trade route that connected Damascus to Jerusalem. Perhaps that's one of the reasons why we learn that there is a Roman centurion stationed here. A Roman centurion was a commander of a century or a 100 soldiers. At some point, this Roman centurion had been brought to faith in the true God, the God of the Israelites who reveals Himself in the Bible. He came to know and trust that Jesus wasn't just a great prophet, but the Promised Savior. So what does He do? When he learned that Jesus was in town he sent some of the elders of the Jews to Jesus to ask him to come and heal his servant. His servant is close to death. Someone very near and dear to him is about to die. And here is where we see that faith is exercised, right? When everything in life is going well that we don't think we need God, it's when storms come, when problems rise. Someone once said that trials and difficulties are like the exercise gym for your faith. When you exercise you break down your muscles so that they can rebuild and become even stronger. God uses trials to do that for our faith in him.

But this is also where we see the first evidence of great faith. Notice, the centurion's request isn't for himself, it's for his servant who is sick and about to die. He's thinking about others. His faith was also evident in what the elders tell Jesus about him. He loved God and he loved people. We're told that he "loves our nation" and "he built our synagogue." There's a word that isn't translated in the English but it literally says, "he built our synagogue himself." In other words, it implies that he built the synagogue out of his own means, his own money as a place for people to worship God and learn about God. He's thinking of others, not himself, that's what makes faith great.

But that's not it. The second thing is that great faith has the right object. You can trust the brakes in your car all you want, but they can be unreliable. I've been driving before and unbeknownst to me, a brake line busted and there was no pressure in the brake system, my brakes failed me. Faith needs the right object. Not only did this centurion believe that the only true God is the God of the Bible, but through the work of the Holy Spirit he also was brought to the conviction that Jesus is the Savior, who has not only the power to heal his servant but the grace and love to do it as well.

The Jewish elders don't seem to have this, do they? They come to Jesus and say, "This man deserves to have you do this." Why would they say that? They have the wrong idea of God, don't they? Many people live like this in our world. "I do this, I do that, I deserve God to do things for me. I live a good life, I should get a good life." That may be faith, but that's faith in the wrong object. That's trusting in yourself, not in God.

You see, faith is only as good as it's object. I can trust in my brakes all I want, but they can fail me. And so, it's not so much even the strength of your faith that matters, it's the object. Many people today have this idea that it doesn't really matter what you believe in, what faith you have, what religion you are, what matters is that you believe with all your heart. Now, there are a number of problems with that. Hitler believed with all his heart that he was right, but he believed the wrong thing and it was devastating. Or, another example, two mountain climbers suddenly trip and fall onto a ledge, and there are only two ways off the ledge. There's a little rocky outcrop over here they could step on, and there's a little rocky outcrop over here they could step on. The one climber says, "I know that will hold us up. I have no doubts. I am filled with assurance that's the way. I am going to step that way." The other climber says, "I think that's the right way, but I don't know, I'm scared to death, I don't believe it, I'm going to have to step the other way." The first climber steps his way, it's an unstable rock, and he falls. The second climber steps the other way, and it's just fine, he saved. Who was saved/ The man who believed with all his heart? No. The man who believed in the right rock. Here's the comfort: It's not the strength of your faith or the perfection of your faith. It's the object of your faith.

Notice, the object of the centurion's faith is Jesus. Notice what he says, "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for 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." Notice that he doesn't say, "I deserve this, you should do this." That would be relying on himself. Nor does he say, "I don't deserve this, don't come." That would also be relying on himself or his lack of goodness. Rather, he says, "I don't deserve this, please do this." In other words, "I don't deserve anything from you on my own, but I know you are gracious and loving and merciful and I rest on your mercy and grace to do this." That faith in the right object – Jesus.

And finally, great faith knows the power of words. He was a man under authority and when he told a servant to do this, he did it, or to go here, he went there, or to come, he came. And if he, a man under authority, had that power in his words, then how much more power does the very Ruler of all and King of kings with all divine power have in His words! He knew all Jesus would have to do was say the word and his servant would be healed. He had implicit trust in the power of Jesus' words.

Finally, the healing of the Centurion's servant was simply a bonus. What was worth far more was the trust of this centurion to know and believe that Jesus had the power as God to be able to simply say the word and heal someone. Jesus didn't have to be there. All Jesus would need is to will it to happen and it would. Why? Because Jesus has all power.

Then Jesus was amazed by this Centurion's faith. He said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." But Jesus' commendation of this Gentile centurion's faith was a "double-edged" sword. Remember, Jesus only commended 2 people that we know of for having great faith. Both were Gentiles, both were non-Jews. Jesus had every right to expect great faith from the people who had His Word, had His promises, had the history of God's faithfulness, the accounts of God's incredible power on behalf of His people- to part the Red Sea and to cause walls to fall down at the sound of voices. But who does Jesus complement for great faith? It's a Gentile! It makes us glad to see this because you and I are gentiles too, but is that the only similarity we have with this centurion? Do we have a faith such as he did? Would Jesus complement us for having such a great faith? We, as Christians, most of us who have grown up in the church, have had God's promises held before us since we were children, brought to Sunday School, Christian day school, confirmation classes, come to church, but do we have a "great faith"?

So often aren't we paralyzed by fear? We doubt our God's power. We worry about the future. We wonder how God could still be in control of all things. So often is our trust in God's promises simply a mental thought and not a conviction of our hearts? We know God is all-powerful, but when the rubber hits the road, when trouble meets us head on, when we're in turmoil, we worry, we wonder, we forget about our God and His power on our behalf, his promises to help us in time of need and work things out for our blessing.

The essence of faith is clinging to the promises of God and trusting that God has the power to do what He has promised to do. Faith is being connected to the promises of God and trusting that God has the power to do what he has promised to do.

So having a great faith is first knowing what God has promised you. Just remember all of the good promises that God has made to you! God tells you that Jesus really did come to this earth, live perfectly here, die an innocent death on the cross, and rise again. And since Jesus did that God says, "This is what that means: it means your sins are forgiven in full, you and me are one again, there is no separation between us anymore. And further He's promised to be with you always, does He have the power to do that? He's promised to watch over you, to guide you, to care for you, to provide for your daily needs, to cause all things to work for your good, to forgive all your sins, to take you to heaven when you die. Does He have the power to do those things? Absolutely!

He's promised to work all things out for the good of his people. He's promised to use all things in order to spread His gospel message in the world and to build the faith of his people. Even when things don't work out the way that we had expected or the way we planned or the way we wanted, we know without a doubt God's blessings will be there. God's promised it. So no matter what situation great faith is always saying, "I know God will work this for my good. I'm going to look for God's blessing in this. Even when I can't see it or can't tell how, I know God is working this for my good and the blessing of His people." "God's been with me in the past, He's carried me through so much stuff already, He's been faithful to me and He promises to be faithful to me in the future, and so when the storms of life come and the waves of danger or disaster loom, so I know I can weather through any storm this world may bring at me."

You know, we put a lot of trust in the brakes in our car because they've been there for us, they've proven faithful to us. Let's put more faith in our God! He will always be there for you, He will continue to care for you, continue to watch over you, continue to work things for your good, He's promised it and does he have the power to do it? Absolutely! And one day Jesus has promised that he will take you to be with him forever. Does he have the power to do that? Absolutely! Trust Him! Believe Him! Have great faith in your great Lord! Amen.