

Luke 7:1-10

As far as we know, the centurion in our text never actually met Jesus, never got a glimpse of what He looked like, never spoke with Him face-to-face. And yet he had a better grasp of Jesus than any of God's chosen people, even His closest disciples. He got it. He understood the Christian Faith. Not in such a way that he became boastful and proud, but in a way that made Jesus stand up and take notice and say, "Wow! This man's faith is amazing."

What about us? Do we cause Jesus to stand up and take notice? Does our faith bring an exclamation to His lips? One thing is certain--we do not impress God with what we do. People are impressed. We live in a shallow society. Anyone who can hit, throw, or catch a ball well, belt out a pop song, or perform before a movie camera makes people stand up and take notice. People take notice when hard work is involved. That's how promotions are given. People notice when acts of kindness are done. The Jewish elders noticed such things about the centurion. He was a Gentile, but he loved their nation and he built their church, their synagogue. And they were impressed. "*He is worthy,*" they told Jesus, "*worthy to have you come and heal his sick servant.*"

Now Jesus did not walk the other way when they said these things. He is not impressed with the same things that we are, but He is not necessarily against the things that impress us either. God gives us abilities in the areas of athletics, music, and the arts. He gives us opportunities to put our minds and hands to work. And it's good for us to use what God has given. But even the godless in society do such things. Even atheists sent money to help the tornado victims in Oklahoma. Jesus went with the elders to the home of the centurion, but not because the man was such an outstanding citizen. He went to heal his servant because it is the nature of God to show compassion.

But along the way, Jesus came to a stop and He marveled at the man He was going to see. "*Never,*" He said in astonishment, "*Never have I found such faith!*" Here's how it happened. The centurion sent friends to Jesus to tell Him not to trouble Himself by coming to his house. "*For I am not worthy (of that),*" he said. "*But say the word and let my servant be healed.*"

"*Say the word!*" This centurion did not just have faith in Jesus; he had faith in His words! But that really is what faith is. Scores of people followed Jesus because they saw Him do miracles. But that's not faith. For when Jesus opened His mouth to speak, most all of these left in unbelief. To have faith in Jesus is to have faith in His words. And this describes the centurion. Jesus did not need to come to his house to heal his servant. His word would heal him. And so he commands Jesus, "*(Just) say the word.*"

That sounds kind of presumptuous, doesn't it? Commanding Jesus. Telling Him what to do. Yet he was not a proud man at all. Others put him on a pedestal. Others were impressed with him. "*He is worthy!*" they told Jesus. But the centurion was not impressed with himself. "*I am not worthy,*" were his words to the Lord.

That is our confession as well. Rather than eulogize ourselves like Pharisees, we agree with the centurion: 'I am not worthy of eternal salvation. I, instead, deserve punishment now and forever.' Other people may, or may not, be impressed with us. But a true Christian is not impressed with himself. "*I see my sins against Thee, Lord,*" we say with the hymn writer. We may be worthy of promotions at work. We may be worthy of A's and B's on our report card. But we are not worthy to stand in the presence of God. The centurion said it and we confess it.

But though he was not worthy, yet this man commands Jesus. *"Say the word,"* he told Him, *"(Just) say the word."* That's faith. It doesn't take faith to be humble. But it does take faith to hold Jesus to His word. We do the same thing. We do not just humbly come before God and confess that we are unworthy sinners. We hold Him to His word. We command Him as well. *"Forgive me my sins,"* we tell Him. *"Forgive me for the sake of Jesus."* That's not being presumptuous--telling God what to do. That's faith. "Say the word!" we cry, "Just say the word and your servant will be forgiven."

I met a man three months ago who could not do this. He had the humility. He knew he had lived a sinful life. He knew he needed help, needed forgiveness. But he would not tell God what to do. He believed that his eternal soul was beyond saving. *"There's no hope for me,"* he said.

But there is hope. There is hope...for him and for you. Jesus teaches this in the Lord's Prayer. He tells us to command God. He teaches us to pray, *"Say the word."* *"Father,"* we pray, *"forgive my trespasses. Forgive me and let me forgive others in return."* And God does forgive. He does say the word. Jesus healed the centurions' servant, and He heals you also--heals your eternal soul of every sinful stain. When you were baptized, God said the word. He declared that you are His forgiven child in Christ Jesus. When you come up to the altar, He continues to say the word. *"Take eat...take drink...for the remission of your sins."* When you command God to say the word and absolve you, He does just that. He commands His pastor to turn toward you and forgive you.

God says the word to each one of you because Jesus said the word on the cross for you. *"Father, forgive them,"* He cried. Jesus died for you with the word of mercy on His lips. Because of that, God is always ready to say the word. He has no word to say to those who are impenitent. No word to say to those who refuse to turn from their sins and repent. But for you who are humble; for you who confess, "I am not worthy;" who are burdened with sin and want to be free--free of your sins, free to live in service to God...for you, God does truly say the word. And nothing, not life or death, not even the gates of hell can change that word of God to you. When God says the word, it is the final word.

Look at your sins. And look at the cross of your Savior. And do what your Lord tells you to do. Tell God, for the sake of Jesus, to say the word. He does. His word to you in Christ is, and always will be, forgiven. Amen.