

FPFWC Christian Development



The Measure of Faith

April 2024

Spring Quarter

April 13, 2024

Faith of a Centurion

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Luke 7:1-10

ICE BREAKER –

1. What are some distractions of “great faith” that must be removed in order to live with “Great Faith”?
2. Why is it difficult for us to be as dependent on God as the centurion was?
3. How could you affirm the faith of someone who has been an example to you?

Key Verse: “ Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.”—Luke 7:7

LESSON BACKGROUND

The physical context of today’s lesson is the village of Capernaum (see also the parallel account in Matthew 8:5–13). It was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, a freshwater lake in northern Palestine. Bible students are accustomed to thinking of Jesus as being from Bethlehem (John 7:42; etc.) or from Nazareth (Matthew 2:23; etc.). But a case can also be made for the claim that He was “from Capernaum” because the village became something of a headquarters or base of operations for His preaching and teaching tours of Galilee (4:13; Mark 2:1); notice that Matthew 9:1 refers to Capernaum as Jesus’ “own city.”

The importance of Capernaum is seen in the fact that it is mentioned 16 times in the New Testament, in one instance quite negatively (Matthew 11:23 and parallel Luke 10:15). Five of Jesus’ twelve disciples were residents of Capernaum when Jesus called them to follow Him: four fishermen (James, John, Peter, and Andrew; see Matthew 4:18–22) and one tax collector (Matthew, also known as Levi; see Mark 2:14).

Although Capernaum probably did not have more than a few hundred residents, it was a thriving regional hub for at least three reasons. First, the fishing industry provided steady income for many families. The lake was productive, with one account telling of a haul of 153 large fish (John 21:11). Fishing businesses like that of the Zebedee family (Mark 1:19–20) would have caught more fish than could be sold locally. So some fish were preserved with salt and sent to larger cities such as Jerusalem.

Second, Capernaum was situated on the main road from Damascus into the region. This location made it a good place for the Romans to set up points for tax collectors to assess tolls on goods passing into the area. Matthew worked for the

Romans this way, maintaining a tax-collecting booth on this road (Luke 5:27). Jewish tax collectors from Jerusalem also operated out of Capernaum to collect the annual temple tax from the Jews of Galilee (Matthew 17:24).

Third, Capernaum was important enough to have had some Roman soldiers stationed there, as today's lesson reveals (compare Acts 10:1). The need to safeguard the tax money collected may have been the reason. It is possible they were under the authority of Herod Antipas, the Roman client "tetrarch" of the Galilee region from 4 BC to AD 39 (Luke 3:1).

Capernaum has been the site of some remarkable archaeological discoveries over the last hundred years. A lavish synagogue dating from the fourth century AD likely sat on a foundation floor from the time of Jesus. This place could be the location of the synagogue of Capernaum where Jesus taught (Mark 1:21). Also uncovered nearby is a large house that has become a Christian pilgrimage site. Evidence suggests this was the actual house of Simon Peter, a place where Jesus resided while in town (Luke 4:38).

LESSON COMMENTARY

7:1–10. In this account of a healing the unexpected element is the centurion himself. This man—a Gentile (likely a Roman) was a centurion—a leader of soldiers (7:8a). A centurion had to be a tough, fair, and authoritative figure. This particular centurion was depicted as a loving master who was concerned about his sick slave (7:2), and was a **worthy** man, esteemed by the Jewish people under his jurisdiction (7:4), a man civil—even cordial—to the Jewish nation (**he loves our nation** 7:5a), and a generous man (he **built us our synagogue** 7:5b). There is possibly an implicit fulfillment of Gn 12:3 here. Because the soldier was kind to the Jewish people, he himself received a blessing from the Lord. Furthermore, even though he apparently had never seen but had only heard of Jesus, he sent for Him to **come and save the life of his slave** (Lk 7:3b). Despite his own authority, the centurion was deferential, not considering himself worthy of a personal visit from the Master (7:6, 7). He displayed a great faith and an understanding of Jesus' authority and power (7:8b). For this he not only received an answer to his request—His servant was healed (7:10)—but Jesus commended him for his faith (7:9). Jesus is thus seen as One with authority, compassion, and power to heal—all qualities of the Messiah (cf. Is 61:1; cf. Lk 7:18–23).

LESSON NUGGET – **He did not deserve it** – “I am not worthy” was the centurion's confession of humility: and his confession of faith was, “Say the word!”. It is great faith when we trust Christ to work just by speaking the Word. We can never deserve His blessings, but we can ask for them in faith.

Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word for Today Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary*