

Luke 7:1-10

Pentecost 2; June 23 & 24, 2019

What is true greatness? We all have our own definitions of greatness. But, how does the world define true greatness? One way is by a person's *talent and abilities*. Teddy Roosevelt claimed he had a photographic memory. He could recite entire newspaper pages—not just articles—as if they were sitting in front of him. He was also a speed reader and is reported to have read two or three books a day. Others define greatness by their *accomplishments*. What Steve Jobs did in building Apple to the point that it is today is pretty phenomenal. Others might look back at *historical accomplishments*, think about George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison and Susan B. Anthony, to name a few. The impact they had on American history is monumental. Others think greatness is really all about *power*. Leaders in the military and government may have a great amount of power. Similarly, some people define greatness by how *quickly someone climbs the ladder* of a large corporation – who has the biggest staff, the most prestigious title, and makes the most money. **What does it really mean to be truly great?** Let's look at the words of our text to find the answer to that question.

The Romans occupied the city of Capernaum. A Roman military unit was stationed there. Their commander was the Roman Centurion found in our text. Centurions were the backbone of the Roman military. They were responsible for executing orders, crushing revolts and maintaining the peace. They were highly respected and highly paid. They were not afraid to carry out orders and use that power. But this man was different.

The Romans usually hated the Jews, and the feeling was mutual. Yet, look what happens here. The Centurion is described as **“loving their nation and building their synagogue.”** This guy loves the Jewish people there. It wasn't just lip service. He showed it in his actions towards them. He put his money where his mouth was when he built their synagogue. He didn't do it to show off or build a name for himself. He didn't do it expecting to get something in return. He did it because he loved their nation. But more importantly, He loved God. Somewhere along the way, he heard the Word of God and came to faith. He knows that this situation is far beyond any of his abilities to help.

What does he do when there was nothing more that he could do? Luke tells us: **“The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.”** The Jewish leaders probably meant well when they added to the request of the Centurion. *“But this guy deserves for you to help this man. Look at all he has done for us.”* But that's not what the Centurion does.

The Centurion could have trusted in his power. He could have trusted in his wealth. He could have trusted in his authority. He could have trusted the Roman doctors or the Roman gods. But he doesn't trust in any of those things. He trusted in Jesus. He goes to Jesus. He doesn't bargain with Jesus. He doesn't say to Jesus: *If you do this, I can do this for you.* He doesn't expect anything in return. He just simply trusts that Jesus can do something for his servant.

This man's faith in Jesus was so great that Jesus says to the elders: **“I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.”** When Jesus calls someone's faith great, we stand up and take notice. There are only two people that Jesus speaks about have **“great faith.”** This centurion and a Canaanite woman whose daughter was demon-possessed. Both of which were foreigners. He doesn't even use that phrase with his own disciples. Think of how many times, he does tell the disciples that they were of *little* faith. This man's faith teaches us what we are to do when problems come into our life. Just send for Jesus.

“Great faith” also has the right attitude toward Jesus. He realized that God had no reason to come to his house. He did not deserve to have Jesus to help his servant. The Centurion had confidence that Jesus could help. He trusts that all Jesus needs to do is **“say the word, and my servant will be healed.”** This Centurion knew a little about giving orders and saying the word as a soldier. **“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.”** Soldiers understand following orders and giving orders. They understand saying the word. They understand carrying out those words, even if it means giving their life for their country. This Centurion loved his nation and the nation of the Jews. But more importantly, he loved Jesus. He knew that Jesus loved him. All he needs Jesus to do is say the word. What is great faith? *It's trusting that Jesus will say the word.*

If you are like me, we don't always fully trust Jesus to just say the word. We bargain with God. *If you do this, I'll do this... This person doesn't deserve this.... I did this for you God, now it's your turn God....* We may not be quite as bold in our own words, but we too often find ourselves thinking that way. Trust Jesus to **“say the Word, and my servant will be healed.”** This Centurion had an incredible attitude toward Jesus. He knew that he didn't deserve Jesus to heal his servant. He doesn't want the focus to be on him or anything he had done. He just simply trusts Jesus. He knows Jesus was in control when everything seemed to be out of control.

Two thousand years ago, God had this account recorded for you and me, because the centurion isn't the only one who finds himself facing troubles that are beyond his control. You probably don't have a household servant who's sick and dying. Maybe it's looking at your budget every night and wondering how in the world you'll have food on the table next week. Maybe it's watching as your marriage seems to be unravelling before your eyes. Maybe it's something you're struggling with that no one knows about but you. And no matter how much you have in your life, all the sudden it hits you that it's not enough. Jesus wants us to know that no matter how far something seems to be out of control, it isn't. He hasn't left us. He hasn't gone on vacation. He's still here. He's still there saying the Word.

Martin Luther once said that the human heart is an idol factory. That means, by nature, we spend all of our lives looking for hope in all of the wrong places. Looking for God in all the wrong places. It doesn't need to be that way. God's given you the promise that you can always find him in his Word, that when you go to God's promises, there you'll find what we truly need. There you will find forgiveness in Jesus. There you will find hope and peace. What does it mean to be great? Trust in Jesus who is greater than anything that we can possibly imagine. Incredible faith simply trusts an incredible God who has done incredible things for us. May the Lord help each of us to trust Jesus to “say the word.” Amen.