

What is Great Faith?

His name was Walter Elias. Before Walter was five, his parents moved from Chicago to a farm in Missouri. It was on that farm that Walter would have his first encounter with death. Walter was only seven that particular summer afternoon. Dad was tending chores. Mom was in the house. It was a perfect day to go exploring. As he was exploring, he saw a bird that he had never seen before in the low branches of an apple tree. It was an owl. As he slowly approached closer, the owl did not move or open his eyes. Finally, he was close enough, he slowly reached out and grabbed the bird by its legs. He had captured it.

The owl, waking suddenly, came alive like no other animal Walter had ever seen. It's beating wings, wild eyes and frightened cries struggled against the boy's grasp. Walter, stunned, held on. Out of fear, he threw the bird to the ground and stomped it to death. When it was over, he looked down on the heap of feathers lying on the ground. Ashamed and frightened he buried the dead bird. He told no one until much later in his life. But that one summer day changed his life. Never again would Walter kill a living animal. All though he could not bring the owl back to life, he began to give life to all kinds of animals through his drawings. His animals went on many different kinds of adventures. Even though Walter is no longer living, his drawings and animations still live on. Most everyone who is here today, knows and even possesses Walter's drawings and art. You see Walter Elias is Walt Disney. *"Now you know the rest of the story."*¹

Many of you may be familiar with Paul Harvey's, *The Rest of the Story*. Like a Paul Harvey story, our text is filled with people who will take twists and turns that are not expected. As we look at the Roman Centurion in our text, you can't help but wonder: *What shaped his life?* The actions and words of this Centurion are so different from what would be expected. *Why would Jesus speak of this man's faith as being 'great faith?'* Let us look at the answer to the question: ***"what is great faith?"***

Capernaum was an important town. 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 Centurion was different than any other Centurion who had been in Capernaum. The Romans occupied the city of Capernaum. 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. It wasn't just the Jews that he loved and respected. He also valued highly a servant of his. So highly, that he will go to almost any length to save him.

This story gets more remarkable than this. 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."** Not only does the Centurion love the Jews, but they love him back. If you were visiting Capernaum at this time, what you see going on here is so different than expected. You would almost want to know *what the rest of the story is*. This is not normal. I think these Jews elders meant well as they tried to persuade Jesus to come and heal this Centurion's servant. **"This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."** The Centurion didn't ask them to say that. In fact, the Centurion knew that he didn't deserve to have Jesus do this -- **"Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof."**

This man's faith in Jesus was so great that he says to the elders: **"I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel."** There are only a couple of people in the Bible that Jesus describes as having **"great faith."** He doesn't even use that phrase for his disciples. He just simply trusts Jesus and trusts that Jesus could do something about his servant. He

¹ Paul Harvey's "Eulogy for an Owl."

could have trusted the Roman physicians or all the Roman gods. He could have trust his money and resources. No – instead he just simply trusts Jesus. He doesn't bargain with Jesus. He doesn't expect anything. He just simply trusts.

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 love their country and they serve it well, even today. 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.

Incredible faith simply trusts an incredible God. This is not complicated. Faith – that is the rest of the story for our entire life in Jesus. That encounter that one day with Jesus changed the life of the centurion and his servant. They would never be the same. With Jesus our life can never be the same. May the Lord help each of us to trust Jesus to **“say the word.”** Amen.