

I.N.I.

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Jan. 31, 2016
Luke 7:1-10

In Christ Jesus, in whom alone we place our trust and confidence for this life and for eternity,
Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We have mentioned several times in the past few weeks that the main thought for Epiphany is the manifestation or showing forth of Jesus as God, the Savior of mankind. We also mentioned that Epiphany is called the Gentile Christmas for it is the celebration of the appearance of Christ to the first Gentile Christians mentioned in the New Testament—the Wise Men from the east.

Well in our text this morning we have both of these thoughts combined into one text. Jesus displays His power as the Son of God by means of a miracle and we see that it is the Gentile Centurion who is the recipient of this marvelous Epiphany.

What is faith? Most of us know that faith means “to trust, to rely on.” But to trust what, to rely on what or whom? The world surely doesn’t know. We hear of people who have endured tremendous difficulties and they talk of faith—faith in themselves, faith in their friends, faith in mankind; faith in the American spirit. Scripture uses the word faith only in one sense—and that is in the Triune God or our Savior, Jesus Christ. The word literally means “firm persuasion” or “conviction based upon hearing.” And it is always used in regard to Jesus or God or spiritual things.

In our text this morning we find the answer to this question:

WHAT KIND OF FAITH DOES JESUS CALL GREAT?

On two occasions Jesus praised someone’s faith as being great—this one and in the case of the woman from Canaan, who persistently pleaded for Jesus to help her daughter. It is interesting to note that in both cases Jesus said this of a Gentile rather than a Jew—one who had not had the message of redemption and salvation all his/her life. And in both cases they came to Jesus with requests for somebody else, not for themselves.

And that is our first point. What kind of faith does Jesus call great?

I: AN UNSELFISH FAITH WHICH THINKS FIRST OF OTHERS, NOT OF SELF.

The Centurion, a commander of 100 soldiers was deeply concerned about the welfare of his men. One of his servants, not even a soldier, but one of his slaves who probably had been a captured enemy, whom he valued highly, was dying. As a result of his loving concern this Centurion sought help from the only place he knew could help; from God.

We see that this man evidently was a proselyte, a convert to the Jewish religion. We see that he also loved the Jewish people, which was very rare—a Roman soldier loving the Jewish people? In fact this man loved them so much that he built a synagogue for them in Capernaum. In these few verses we are given a description of a man who out of love for his God is moved to love his slave and to love his soldiers who served under him. His love and faith in Jehovah God also showed in his actions—his building of the temple and his coming to Jesus to try to save his servant from death. Quite an unselfish faith!

II: A FAITH THAT LOOKS TO CHRIST AS GOD.

This was a Christ-centered faith. The Centurion knew who Jesus was. He knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Savior of mankind, the Christ, the Chosen One, anointed of God. That is why he turned to Jesus for help. He knew that Jesus had the power to help and heal. Our text says that the Centurion heard about Jesus. He had heard the message of Christ, heard of His preaching, of His miracles and he was persuaded and convinced by what he heard, by the Word, that Jesus was His Savior and Lord. His faith rested and relied upon Jesus, so that he asked Jesus to come and heal his servant.

III: A HUMBLE FAITH THAT DEPENDS ON GOD’S GRACE, NOT ON ONE’S OWN MERITS.

We notice two things about the manner in which this man asks Jesus for help. First of all he sends the Jewish elders to speak with Jesus. He doesn’t even feel worthy enough to speak

directly with the Christ, in fact as he saw Jesus approaching this leader of men felt compelled to ask Jesus to not even come into his house. Our text says: **"LORD, DO NOT TROUBLE YOURSELF, FOR I AM NOT WORTHY THAT YOU SHOULD ENTER UNDER MY ROOF. THEREFORE I DID NOT EVEN THINK MYSELF WORTHY TO COME TO YOU."**

Wow! What a humble man. And this is a man of great power and authority. He is a Centurion, a trained Roman soldier with 100 soldiers under him, the head of a garrison or outpost. This man no doubt was raised a heathen, trained to trust in himself and his own efforts. He no doubt was taught to be proud of his own accomplishments, taught to be the best he could be, taught he could do anything if he only put his total effort of mind and body to it. Taught to trust in his Emperor and in the Roman Empire. Yet, he humbly sends his friends to tell Jesus that he doesn't even deserve to have Jesus come into his home.

We also see that he never mentioned any of his deeds done out of love. He was not the one that told Jesus about his building the synagogue; or about his great love for the Jewish people. This the Jewish leaders brought up. They were the ones who told Jesus about these facts. They made it sound as if this man was worthy enough for Jesus to come and heal his servant, but the man himself realized his own sinfulness and unworthiness, no matter how much he had done.

And that is a great faith—one which acknowledges one's sins and depends totally on God's grace in Christ Jesus and not on any merits of its own. This man did not expect any reward. He was not looking for Jesus to say thank you and because of your good deeds I will do this for you. He was not boasting or bragging about himself and was not seeking any praise or honor. His confession was of a humble sinner coming before His powerful Lord and King.

IV: A FAITH WHICH TRUSTS COMPLETELY IN GOD'S WORD.

The Centurion knew that Jesus didn't have to come to see, or touch his servant. If He had power to heal, He needed only to say the Word and it would be done. This Centurion who was over other men realized the little power that he had. When he made a command his soldiers and his servants jumped and obeyed. But what is that compared to the Son of God who has all power in heaven and on earth, all power over all things. This Centurion was only over 100 men and some servants. He also had other people over him. Jesus is Lord and King over all. He rules and reigns over all and His Word is all powerful. Certainly one can trust completely in the authority of such a one as this; trust in the authority and power of the Word of God---**BUT SAY THE WORD, AND MY SERVANT WILL BE HEALED**, the Centurion testified.

Even Jesus was astonished. Amazed He said **"I SAY TO YOU, I HAVE NOT FOUND SUCH GREAT FAITH, NOT EVEN IN ISRAEL!"**

Do you know the question we need to ask ourselves? We need to ask ourselves—Is Jesus amazed at our faith? Is He amazed because of the greatness of our faith? Or is it more often that He is amazed because of the weakness of our faith?

Is ours an unselfish faith? One which thinks first of others, and not of our self. Or do we spend our time serving self far more than faithfully serving others? Are we genuinely concerned about family, friends, neighbors, fellow workers, congregation members, the poor and needy and especially those who do not know Jesus—the unbelievers. Do we seek the welfare of others and then trust that the Lord will take care of us. Great faith realizes that we will have all of our needs taken care of by our Lord and Savior. Our purpose is to serve Him by serving others. Putting God and our fellow man first in our lives is part of great faith!

Is our faith a Christ-centered faith? Or do we too often place our faith in material things, or other people—like doctors, our government leaders, our armed forces, our jobs, our bank accounts and retirement benefits? Do we put our faith in our faith—meaning that we trust that our faith will get us through? True faith relies on Jesus; knows that Jesus as the Son of God is all powerful. He is the One we can turn to for forgiveness, for everlasting life, for salvation, for every needed blessing. This faith comes from the conviction worked in us by the Gospel that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, our personal Lord and Savior and the Savior of all of mankind.

Is ours a humble faith—one which relies and depends on God's grace, rather than on one's

own merit? How can it be otherwise? We know ourselves better than anyone else. We know how often we have failed to obey God's commands in thought, word and deed. Rather than feel that somehow we deserve God's blessings, or merit God's gifts; genuine, great faith realizes that we deserve nothing but death and damnation and it is only by God's undeserved love for us in Christ that we receive forgiveness, life, salvation and a multitude of other blessings.

Who of us would be so humble so as to not rush up to Christ and ask for His blessings? Who of us would feel unworthy for our Savior to come into our homes? Who of us feel that we are nothing before our Creator-Redeemer? By nature we surely don't feel that way. But when the Holy Spirit works in our hearts with His Law and Gospel He creates faith---a genuine faith that does not base its claims on any merit or personal good work, but on God's grace in Christ alone.

And finally we need to ask ourselves is ours a faith which trusts completely in God's Word? How often don't we in times of crises, moments of temptation; when hard decisions need to be made; how often don't we fail to trust what Christ tells us in His Word and try to do it on our own? We worry, we are filled with anxiety and doubt. The Lord says: **(WE) CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS (US)**. Do we believe that? The Lord tells us: **YET IN ALL THESE THINGS WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US**. Do we trust that **THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST HIS SON CLEANSSES US FROM ALL SIN?** Do we believe that **ALL SCRIPTURE IS GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD, AND IS PROFITABLE FOR DOCTRINE, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS?** Do we have the confidence in knowing that **GOD'S WORD IS TRUTH?**

BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND YOU WILL BE SAVED! The Centurion believed in Jesus and his faith simply said: **SAY THE WORD, LORD! AND IT WILL BE DONE!**

Jesus' Word has the power to heal, forgive, raise the dead, control nature, create and strengthen faith, rebuild and restore broken lives and relationships, bring peace and contentment into burdened and fear-filled hearts and so much more.

Our text closes with these words: **THEN THE MEN WHO HAD BEEN SENT RETURNED TO THE HOUSE AND FOUND THE SERVANT WELL WHO HAD BEEN SICK.** A faith which takes Jesus at His Word will never be disappointed.

Amen.