

# **FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA**

## **The Centurion's Great Faith**

By  
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*Matthew 8:1-13*

Jesus said that the centurion that came to him seeking healing for his servant had a greater faith than anyone in Israel. That is an amazing statement. It deserves respectful investigation. What was it about this soldier that evoked from Jesus such unqualified approval? Here is the Lord Jesus, surrounded by the multitudes, attended by his inmost corp of disciples who had decided to follow him, having left their homes and occupations, and out of them all our Lord singles out this centurion as the man with the greatest faith of any of them.

Others had come to him. We read in this same chapter of a leper who had come for cleansing and who had received it. But our Lord never said anything about his faith being great.

What is faith anyway? Why is faith so important? Does faith just believe there is a God? In that case faith shouldn't be too hard.

A fellow was on an airplane flight home one afternoon. He sat in what was the non- smoking section, as he always did. This incident occurred before smoking was totally prohibited on all aircraft but there were nonsmoking sections available. This day he was seated on the aisle of the plane. After the plane had taken off the man across from him took out one of those little short cigars that look like compressed leather. He lit up and started puffing noxious- black smoke into the air. The first man leaned across the aisle and said,, "I'm sorry, sir, but this is the non- smoking section. You can't smoke here." The smoker just ignored him, and looked straight ahead as if no one else in the world existed. Finally the fellow had enough and called for the stewardess.

The stewardess came down the aisle and asked, "Can I help you?" The fellow said, "Yes, this man is ignoring the non-smoking section and smoking that awful thing!" The stewardess said to the smoker, "I'm sorry, sir, but this is the non-smoking section and you can't smoke here. There are some seats in the back, if you would like you can go to that section, but in any case you can't smoke cigars anywhere on the plane."

The man ignored her and kept puffing on his cigar. The stewardess went to the back of the plane, exasperated. Later in the flight, the plane began to run into some turbulence. Just as the stewardess passed the cigar-smoker they hit an air pocket and she spilled her entire tray of beverages in his lap. Then reacting to her fall she leaned back and fell right in the lap of the first man who had complained about the cigar smoker.

Later on, relating the incident to a friend, he said, "Don't tell me there is no God. I have proof!"

That man's faith was based on what he believed was God's providential rebuke to the cigar smoker and a token of humorous approval of his own stand for law and order. I am not sure the stewardess would have agreed. She was probably somewhat embarrassed and upset by the whole thing.

Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, we do not see Providence always dispensing instant justice. The hardest thing to reconcile with faith in God is the presence of evil and tragedy in our world. It is a fact that many Jews, believing in a just God, became atheists after the Nazi Holocaust when some seven million Jews were summarily put to death..

Hugh Nissenson, in an interview with the New York Times about his book, "*The Elephant and My Jewish Problem*." told about meeting with a French Jesuit priest during the trial of Klaus Barbie. The priest declared that not even the murder of children shook his faith. "It cost me mine," replied Nissenson, who had covered the trial of Adolph Eichmann in Jerusalem He said: "I cannot assent." He said that he had

come to the place where he could not believe. It took him a long time, because he wanted to believe, "because I loved the beliefs he said.

He probably spoke for many who are like him. They would like to believe, but feel that they cannot.

I believe where such people miss the mark is in that they make belief in a good God dependent upon the proofs they see of God's justice and goodness in this present evil world. That is a fatal mistake. Justice is not always meted out in this life. Many things that happen in this world must await the Day of Judgment. On that Day God will execute perfect justice and right every wrong.

## I. Faith Is A Very Personal Thing.

The 11th chapter of Hebrews defines faith and gives a number of examples of men and women of faith for us to study. An important verse in that chapter says,

**<sup>6</sup>And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Heb. 11:6 (NASB)**

And that is just the point. Faith must not only believe that God is, it must believe that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Just knowing there is a God is merely intellectual assent. It lacks a coming to God combined with a confidence that he is a rewarder of those who seek Him. It is not what God has done in other person's lives; it comes down to what I believe He will do if I personally seek Him.

The centurion showed faith by coming to God manifest in the flesh -- Jesus the Christ. He came believing that his request was a worthy one and that Jesus could grant him an answer.

In the case of the leper, the leper had come to Jesus saying, "**Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.**" V. 2. But the centurion did not doubt that the Lord Jesus was willing. He comes entreating Jesus, urgently beseeching Jesus, that his servant's suffering might be relieved. The Lord Jesus, sensing that this man really believed that He could heal his servant without ever going to where he lay, said something unusual. He said, "**I will come and heal him.**"

This word of Christ in effect says to this centurion and to all of us here today – **I have the power and authority to heal.**

What doctor do you know who would make such a statement. A doctor might say, "I will come and do what I can. I will try my best to diagnose the case, but I cannot guarantee the patient will get well." But Jesus says without hesitation --**I will come and heal him.**

No ifs, ands or buts about it. That is not to say that the Lord wills to heal everyone as he did this centurion's servant. But He did will to heal the man for whom the centurion was pleading for he said; **I will come and heal him.**

I believe Jesus said these words, not only to tell the man that he was getting what he asked for, but also to see what the man would say. Oh, what we say is so important. Be careful what you say. Think well what you say to the Lord.

Listen to what the centurion said. Note it well! For because of what this man said, the Lord declared that this man had the greatest faith of any he had come across in Israel. **Matt. 8:8-9 (NASB)** **<sup>8</sup>But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>9</sup>"For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."**

This man recognized that Jesus had far greater authority than he did. He knew that Jesus was vested with the power of God. He had either heard Him speak, or heard through others of what miraculous powers flowed from His lips, even from His Person. He could easily compare his own power of speech to

that of Jesus. When he commanded a person to do something, it got done. Soldiers understand such things. So Jesus with God's power could heal his servant without ever going personally to him.

During the Gulf War briefings reporters would ask the generals, "Will there be a ground war? Do you plan to order an attack on the ground.?" And they would always answer, "That is up to the Commander-in-chief. When President Bush says the word, we will have a ground war."

The same questions were addressed in 2003 by the press to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, to Joint Chief of Staff General Meyers, and to Field Commander General Tommy Franks, Will we go to war against Iraq and Saddam Hussein? Will there be a war? Are American troops going to leave the staging area of Kuwait and go into Iraq? And always the answer was that decision was up to the Commander-in-chief.

Only the president has the title of commander in chief. Without his words and voice we would never have gone to war either in 1991 or in 2003.

Not everyone approves of the president's decision after it was made. Polls have been taken before and after the decision. But ultimately the only person who has the power to send our troops anywhere is the commander in chief. Like it or not that is the way it works under our system of government. People can agree and people can disagree but one man in our system of government has the ultimate decision to commit troops to a war situation. And most people understand that this is the way the system works.

But not everyone understands the power and authority of Jesus Christ. But this Roman centurion did. He recognized in Jesus a supernatural power, a divine power. If Jesus but said the Word it would happen. **Just say the word, and my servant will be healed.**

This man had faith greater than others because He understood that the sovereign power of God was vested in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Whatever He said would come to pass. And this man was very humble about it too. **Lord, I am not worthy for you to come under my roof.** He doesn't speak as a proud Roman soldier. He is a humble, meek sinner seeking God's favor and blessing, and that not even for himself, but for his servant. And the Lord of glory commends his faith.

## II. Jesus Prophecies That Many Would Come To Faith

A.. Before our Lord speaks the Word of healing for the servant of the centurion, he utters a prophecy :

<sup>10</sup>**Now when Jesus heard *this*, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. <sup>11</sup>"I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; <sup>12</sup>but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." <sup>13</sup>And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that very moment.**  
Matt. 8:10-13 (NASB)

This scripture tells us that Jesus intended and purposed that the Gentiles would come into the true Israel of God. They would be at the same table as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Why? Because they would have faith in Him just as the Roman centurion had. They might not have as great a faith as did the centurion. Many Christians have a puny view of the risen Christ. They do not see Him at the right hand of power at this very moment, exercising dominion over all the earth, ruling with a rod of iron. They believe that will have to happen in the future after He has received the Kingdom. But this centurion believed that Jesus had all power while he was still in a flesh and blood body, before his resurrection and ascension.

I am sure if that centurion were alive today he would come to Jesus through prayer, and believe that from heaven he could do whatsoever he willed to do. His Word would have the power to kill or make alive, to heal or send plagues. And am sure he would believe that God is good, that he is compassionate and kind, that if he came respectfully and humbly that his coming would be rewarded. He would believe the Bible and take God at his word. Yes. Any person who will believe and behave as did the centurion can be a person of great faith.

Do you have such faith today. Are you trusting in Jesus today, not just for yourself, but for others. Do you have a concern for others as did the centurion? I invite you to trust in Jesus today just as the centurion did. Whatever your need is today, take that need to Jesus. He is not walking the earth as a man today, but he is the God man in heaven. He has power to save you from your sins, and he has power to heal you of illness and meet your every need. I invite you to come to him in humble trust today.

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