

• A classic example of great faith

• A Herodian centurion who understood about authority

1. Some believers have greater faith than others

2. Faith can grow

3. Great faith is logical

• Spiritual logic based on an understanding of the nature of authority

• The healing took place without the major characters seeing each other

Jesus finishes preaching on the hillside and returns to Capernaum which was not far away ^{¶1}. There is a Gentile centurion staying there, presumably one of Herod Antipas' soldiers who came from outside Israel.¹ The Herodian soldiers were organised along Roman lines with centurions. This centurion has a servant who is seriously ill ^{¶2}. He knew about Jesus and had heard that Jesus was in Capernaum. He had believed in the God of Israel and was a supporter of the local synagogue. He asks the elders of the synagogue to approach Jesus requesting healing for his sick servant ^{¶3}. So they come to Jesus on behalf of their friend the centurion, pleading how 'worthy' he is ^{¶4}. Jesus starts walking to the house. Some of the elders go ahead to tell the man that Jesus is coming But the man no longer thinks that this is necessary and he sends a message back. Jesus has great authority and this centurion knows all about authority. Let Jesus just say the word and the healing will take place ^{¶5}. Jesus is surprised and praises his great faith. The servant is healed ^{¶6}. The story is a classic example of great faith.

1. **Some believers have greater faith than others.** There is such a thing as great faith. This man is a believer in the promises of God, but also his faith is greater than usual. Some believers have more faith than others. There is also such a thing as small faith ^{¶1}.

2. **Faith can grow.** A careful reading of this story shows that this man's faith is growing. He begins by asking Jesus to come ^{¶1} but then a little later he has more faith and feels even that is unnecessary. Faith can grow as it goes along. Later in this gospel, the apostles will say to Jesus 'Lord increase our faith' ^{¶2}.

3. **Great faith is logical.** It rises to great strength by the logic of its arguments. This is the heart of the matter. What is it that makes faith to be great faith? The answer is: great faith is logical! Listen to this centurion. 'I know all about authority,' he says. 'I am an army officer. I know that one word of authority can get things done. I know that Jesus is a man of authority also. He only has to speak one word, and what He commands will take place.' It is a piece of logical argument. Great faith is always like this. It is logical. We see the same thing in the Syro-Phoenician woman. She also worked out a piece of spiritual logic (as we see in Mark 7:28). Faith looks at God! And then it argues with itself. It says 'I know that Jesus has great authority. I know that Jesus has great mercy – the kind of mercy that will even give a dog some crumbs of food ^{¶1}. I know that Jesus has all power. I know that He is a man of great compassion. So I reckon – I deduce – that He is able and willing to do this thing for me.' This is the spiritual logic of great faith. Spiritual logic is greater than seeing. The centurion had not seen Jesus. Jesus had not seen him. Nor had Jesus seen the sick servant. It all took place without the major characters seeing each other. The centurion did not need to see Jesus! His spiritual logic was enough for him. He knew that Jesus could do what he was asking and he did not need to see Jesus in order to know it.

¶1 7:1
 ¶2 7:2
 ¶3 7:3
 ¶4 7:4-5
 ¶5 7:6-8
 ¶6 7:9-10

¶1 see Luke 8:25; 2:28

¶1 7:3
 ¶2 17:5

¶1 Mark7:28

• *The modern Christian can also have great faith without seeing Jesus*

• *The Holy Spirit opens our eyes*

4. Great faith depends on Jesus' mercy

• *He did not base his appeal on any worthiness!*

5. Great faith can be found in surprising places

• *A foreigner and a pagan*

The modern Christian is in the same position. We have not yet seen Jesus. We shall do so one day. 'Every eye shall see him'. But at the moment we build our lives not on seeing Jesus in His body but upon our spiritual knowledge. The Holy Spirit had opened the eyes of this centurion without him having to see Jesus. The Holy Spirit does the same for us. Without seeing Jesus we know of His great authority, great mercy, great power. We reckon that He can do anything that is within His will and purpose for us.

4. Great faith depends on Jesus' mercy. It is notable that the talk about 'worthiness' does not come from the centurion; it comes from the elders. Maybe that is why the centurion had greater faith than they had! He is not basing his appeal on any worthiness! He feels most unworthy. 'I am just a Gentile,' he says. 'I am not one of the ones to whom You have specially been sent. I don't even deserve that You should come into my house.' Great faith trusts in Jesus' great mercy. Small faith is afraid to ask God for big things. Often we feel so unworthy that we say to ourselves 'I don't think I could ask God for that!' Yet the thing about this centurion is that he combined great humility with great boldness. He felt utterly unworthy that Jesus should give him anything, but he asked anyway!

5. Great faith can be found in surprising places. You would not expect a Gentile to be showing great faith at this stage of Jesus' ministry. Jesus had not yet sent out His gospel to Gentiles. He was ministering only to Jews. This man had a pagan background. He had not grown up among believers. He was a soldier who had been brought into Israel from a foreign country. Yet God can work anywhere and sometimes great faith is found among people that you do not expect to be believers in Jesus at all! Great faith brings great blessing. The servant was healed.

Note

1. Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 17:8:3 mentions the nationalities of Herodian soldiers attending the funeral of Herod the Great.

Slices of Bread from Sovereign World Trust

Chapters from Michael Eaton's Preaching Through The Bible reformatted for Internet distribution



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His expository commentaries are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.

Slices of Bread is an initiative of **Sovereign World Trust**, a UK based ministry that provides Biblical teaching literature to pastors, colleges and libraries in the developing nations. Each week a mailing is distributed with four PDF attachments. We encourage people to forward them or give them out to others. Slices are available free of charge. To be added to the mailing list, please send your request to: slicesofbread@sovereignworldtrust.org.uk



We are always pleased to receive feedback on how you have been using "Slices" or suggestions to improve this programme.