

The previous passage taught us that there are only two kinds of lives, those that bear good fruit and those that bear bad (6:45ⁱ). There are only two foundations on which to build, rock of Jesus or the sand of worldly priorities (6:48,49ⁱⁱ). Both will face the storms of life, but only one type can stand. We must come, hear His words, and then put them into practice. That was the conclusion of the Sermon on the Plain. Today's passage shows us that this applies not only to Jews, but to the rest of us as well. Anyone, anywhere, and in any age can build their life on faith in Jesus and bear good fruit.

¹ *After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.* Luke 7:1 The plain where Jesus gave the previous teaching was near Capernaum, which is on the northern shore of Galilee. After concluding His teaching, He went into the town where He now lived in Peter's home. Excavations of Capernaum have shown there was a Roman barracks on the outskirts. A church has been built over Peter's home. A fourth century synagogue ruin stands over the foundation of the one this centurion built.

² *Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him.* Luke 7:2 Centurions were captains to eighty to one-hundred soldiers. They earned the position through showing themselves capable in numerous battles. They were hardened soldiers but were also level headed. There is something very unusual about this particular centurion. He highly valued his servant, and he loved the Jewish people even to the point of building their synagogue.

Most Romans wanted out of Israel because of the animosity the Jews had toward the occupation. It is similar to how Israeli soldiers must feel about an assignment in the West Bank. Imagine how those soldiers would like a different assignment. The zealot movement was centered in the nearby town of Gamla. Perhaps this is why this centurion was chosen to serve in Capernaum. He was respected by the Jewish people and could therefore bring a calming effect to the area.

³ *When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.* Luke 7:3 Someone told this centurion about Jesus' healing ability. It may have been some of the elders or perhaps it was some of his servants who were among those who were healed in Peter's home (Luke 4:40ⁱⁱⁱ). The centurion asked some of the Jewish elders to request of Jesus that He come heal his servant. These elders would have been elders of the synagogue this centurion helped to build. It would only be natural that out of gratitude for the help the elders would befriend him and attempt to teach him the Scriptures. Apparently, his help in building the synagogue was more than just Roman negotiating tactics, but genuinely from his heart or he would not bother to know the elders, nor would he think their information about Jesus was valid.

⁴ *And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue."* Luke 7:4,5 This tells us the elders of the synagogue of Capernaum were convinced of Jesus' ability to heal, were somewhat sympathetic toward Gentile 'God fearers', and especially grateful for what this centurion had personally done for

them. They saw in the centurion a man who loved the nation of Israel. It was also a way for the elders to tell Jesus the Scriptural reason to answer his request. God told Abraham that He would bless those who bless him (Genesis 12:3^{iv}). This centurion blessed the descendants of Abraham and therefore should be blessed by God. The blessing he had given the Jewish descendants of Abraham living in Capernaum made him worthy to have the request answered. "He loves our nation" was the first and the main reason, but secondly that he built the synagogue. That probably means he funded the construction.

The synagogue of the first century was built of basalt rock, the same kind of rock we have on the rim of the mountains around us here. From the ruins of Capernaum, we can see in the excavation, the town appears to be a place where basalt was shaped into grinding stones for grain and olive presses. The local laborers were probably contracted to take the local rock and shape it for the construction of the synagogue. The fourth century synagogue used the foundation of basalt upon which was set white limestone walls. Excavation of the floor where the offerings would have been collected found first century coins verifying this to be the case.

Later in the passage the centurion says he is not worthy that Jesus should come to his house. The Gentile understood our sinful condition better than the elders (Psalm 14:3^v). While a blessing is promised to those who bless Abraham, the blessing is not because we are worthy but rather that we did what we are supposed to do: bless Israel.

There is a general misconception in our world today. We think we are worthy because we do good deeds, but that is what we should do. The only worthy one is Jesus. He did more than what should be done. The centurion seemed to understand this.

⁶ And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Luke 7:6 The barracks were nearby and the centurion's house most likely would have been within the Roman compound, only three or four blocks from the synagogue and Peter's home. Before they got to the house the friends of the centurion met Jesus and the elders. Those friends relayed a message to them. This message tells us a great deal about the heart of this centurion. While the elders said the centurion was *worthy* because he blessed Israel, the message from the centurion was a confession that he was *unworthy* to have Jesus come under his roof.

I hope we realize that we can all say this. "Jesus, I am unworthy for you to come into my home." By home I mean our earthly tent, these bodies that house our spirits, and also into our family life, the dwelling in which our families reside (2 Peter 1:13^{vi}). The centurion understood the conviction of sin. The elders had most likely shared the laws of Moses with him, and the Spirit of God had applied the law to his heart and shown him his true condition before God. The psalmist wrote, *"Search me O God and know my heart."* Psalm 139:23a

Here we see an illustration of the last message on the two foundations. "If any one comes to me and hears my word ..." (Luke 6:47^{vii}) The centurion had come and heard and applied the Word of God to his own heart and been convicted that he was a sinner, a rebel against God, unworthy of any grace or mercy. That is the first step toward salvation (Hebrews 6:1^{viii}). It is a step that so few are willing to take. It is the narrow gate from which pride would turn us away (Matthew 7:13,14^{ix}). What does the holy God who

created all things see in me? When we look into the mirror of the Law we see how unholy, how rebellious, and self-centered we are (James 1:23-25^x). "For him," says Lewis, "the one essential symptom of the regenerate life is a permanently horrified perception of one's natural and (it seems) unalterable corruption. The true Christian's nostril is to be continually attentive to the inner cesspool."^{xi} But while we are constantly aware of the old self, we do not wallow in the fact of depravity but rather we rejoice in the life of Christ that transforms us from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18^{xii}).

⁷ *Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.* Luke 7:7 When we see our true condition, we can see that to presume God would visit us, let alone enter our home, is the height of arrogance (Psalm 8:3,4^{xiii}). The centurion felt like Jacob when Jacob was returning to the Promised Land and about to face Esau. He prayed to the Lord, ¹⁰ *"I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant,"* (Genesis 32:10a). That is the heartfelt cry of every redeemed person.

Despite his understanding of his unworthy condition, the centurion asked out of love for his dying servant that Jesus might be so gracious as to just speak the word of healing so that the servant might recover. When we pray we must never presume that our worthiness to have Jesus in our home or hear our request is due to anything other than His wonderful mercy and grace that paid our sin debt and gifted us with His righteousness. **He is the worthy One!** We can come boldly to the throne of grace only because of His merit (Hebrews 4:16^{xiv}). What a strange mixture of boldness and humility we see in the centurion: humility because he knew how unworthy he was, and boldness because he knew what Christ could do to save his servant. Perhaps I should add faith to the mix because he had heard of Jesus' compassionate heart and believed.

He asked that Jesus just say the word. Just give the command. The crowds that came for healing sought to touch Jesus to be healed. But we have already seen with the paralytic and the man with the withered hand that Jesus could simply command them to express faith by trying to move and they were healed (Luke 6:10^{xv}; 5:24,25^{xvi}). This Roman Gentile believed Jesus only needed to speak something and it would take place. He continued to explain what he meant.

⁸ *For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."* Luke 7:8 Faith pleases God (Hebrews 11:6^{xvii}). Listen to this centurion's faith and hear what it declares. Just as a commander who has the authority of the government can command those who are under him to act, so Jesus, with the authority of God can command illness to leave. Whether the centurion believed Jesus was commanding the physical or spiritual realm to obey, it was an expression of faith that Jesus was in authority over that realm. Who has authority over the physical or spiritual realms but God!

⁹ *When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."* ¹⁰ *And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.* Luke 7:9,10 Of all the people Jesus encountered, this battle-hardened Gentile centurion had the greatest faith in Jesus' ability. The only other time Jesus was said to marvel at others was

because of the Jews' unbelief (Mark 6:6^{xviii}). Here Jesus marveled at the man's great faith. Notice that He said this to the crowd so that they would not only see that Gentiles can have faith, but that their Jewish faith would be challenged as well.

I like to get a feel of what that was like by putting it into today's setting. Can you picture yourself standing before anyone and declaring you believe that whatever they say will come to pass? Of course not! But then we never encounter anyone with the wonder working power of Jesus. Sure, God answers our prayers and we see miracles. It is the Holy Spirit working in us. But the difference then is that Jesus healed everyone He set out to heal. There were no cases of wondering why God didn't answer His prayer. Walk on water or still waves or heal the human body or cast out demons, all were to proclaim that He is indeed Lord over His creation (Ephesians 1:19-22^{xix}).

When we pray, we know He can answer our prayers. You can't pray a prayer so great that He cannot do. **Our question is whether it is His will (1 John 5:14^{xx})**. Sometimes we presume to know His will, and I believe God has patience with our weakness and even extends grace to us when we are wrong, though we believe we know what He desires. We must learn from those times when prayer is not answered to more clearly discern the voice of the Spirit and the application of His Word.

It saddens me to see people who proclaim God told them such and such and then when it doesn't happen they go on without considering that they were wrong. Instead of learning from it, they are quick to make another outrageous claim and watch it go unfulfilled. Time and time again this happens and there is nothing learned. Each failure should cause us to discern the difference between our own spirit, other spirits, and the voice of the Holy Spirit. (It should be emphasized that the purpose of prophecy in the New Testament was given us by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:3 ³*On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation*. I don't read in that verse that the purpose of prophecy is to predict the future as was sometimes the case when the office of prophet existed in the Old Testament (Luke 16:16^{xxi}).

Jesus can do anything. The question we should ask is if it is His will, for the Scripture says if we ask anything according to His will He hears us. The centurion asked in faith according to God's will. Jesus did what man could not do to show the centurion that his assessment of Jesus being Lord of creation was correct. His faith pleased Jesus. Kent Hughes points out that the centurion amazed Jesus, for this man was a Gentile who had not grown up with the Scriptures. He was wealthy, and as Jesus taught, it is harder for a rich man to be saved than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Matthew 19:24^{xxii}). The centurion appears to have threaded that needle. He was certain. He knew Jesus needed only to speak the word. He saw own condition, but also saw that God is almighty and merciful. This is a universal reality. Anyone, in any culture, in any time can see their depravity and place their faith in God.

This passage does not tell us that Jesus spoke a word of healing, but Matthew tells us He told them "Go and it will be done for you." When the elders returned to the centurion's house they found the servant was well. Matthew says they found the servant was healed at the same hour that Jesus spoke the word. He said it will be done and it was done. Did Jesus go beyond what the centurion asked and not even utter a command?

I have emphasized the faith and humility of the centurion because that seems to me to be the focus of the passage. These two great virtues are a gift from God (Romans 10:17^{xxiii}; 1 Corinthians 12:9^{xxiv}). Jesus challenges us with the declaration that he had not seen such faith in all of Israel. Jesus marveled at this Gentile's understanding and confidence in Him. Gifts are received, but **God's good gifts are limited by our willingness to receive them.** This centurion was willing to receive humility and faith and trust in God. The love he had for his servant drove him to deeper faith and conviction. It reminds me of Luke's sermon a few weeks ago. The desperation and anguish of his heart was met by the great Comforter (2 Corinthians 1:4^{xxv}).

Today, God does not have to prove that Jesus is the God who heals. It was proven over the three years of Jesus' ministry when He walked among us. The centurion's servant and Lazarus did not live forever. They died one day. And we must also accept that there is a time to live and a time to die (Ecclesiastes 3:2^{xxvi}). Nevertheless, we can come humbly to Jesus as this centurion did and ask that He speak the word. If it is God's will, He will do it for my son, for your loved one, for your earnest request, what no man can do. But we must trust that He knows best (Ecclesiastes 3:11^{xxvii}). He knows if the suffering will deepen their walk with God, or if it is best that they leave this earthly life and go into His presence or be miraculously healed. I have seen miraculous healings. I know they take place. I have also wondered why God did not heal, and yet, through both, I trust that our loving heavenly Father knows best, especially when I don't understand.

All He needs to do is speak the word. All we need to do is trust Him and believe that His will is best. We humbly understand that we don't know all that is involved now and in the future. We look to the worthy One who knows all, and in faith we submit all to His will. We know His will is good, for we have seen His love displayed on the cross (Romans 8:32^{xxviii}). Like the centurion, we can cause Jesus to marvel at our faith if we will trust Him even when we don't understand what He has allowed. We'll see this theme repeated next Sunday too as Jesus goes on to drive His point home.

Questions

- 1 How sick was the servant?
- 2 How was the centurion different from others in his position?
- 3 Who did he send to make a request of Jesus?
- 4 What was the Scriptural reason to help the centurion?
- 5 Describe the attitude and faith of the centurion.
- 6 What is the first step toward salvation?
- 7 Who is the only worthy one?
- 8 How did the centurion expect Jesus to heal his servant?
- 9 Is every prayer God's will?
- 10 What do we do when we don't understand why God allows something?

ⁱ **Luke 6:45 (ESV)**

⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

ⁱⁱ **Luke 6:48-49 (ESV)**

⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.

⁴⁹ But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”

ⁱⁱⁱ **Luke 4:40 (ESV)**

⁴⁰ Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.

^{iv} **Genesis 12:3 (ESV)**

³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

^v **Psalms 14:3 (ESV)**

³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

^{vi} **2 Peter 1:13 (NIV)**

¹³ I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body,

^{vii} **Luke 6:47 (ESV)**

⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like:

^{viii} **Hebrews 6:1 (ESV)**

¹ Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

^{ix} **Matthew 7:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

^x **James 1:23-25 (ESV)**

²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.

²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

^{xi} From C.S. Lewis, Letters to Malchom cited in - Preaching the Word – Luke, Volume I: That You May Know the Truth.

^{xii} **2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

^{xiii} **Psalms 8:3-4 (ESV)**

³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?

^{xiv} **Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

^{xv} **Luke 6:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ And after looking around at them all he said to him, “Stretch out your hand.” And he did so, and his hand was restored.

^{xvi} **Luke 5:24-25 (ESV)**

²⁴ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the man who was paralyzed—“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.” ²⁵ And immediately he rose up before them and picked up what he had been lying on and went home, glorifying God.

xvii **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

xviii **Mark 6:6 (ESV)**

⁶ And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching.

xix **Ephesians 1:19-22 (ESV)**

¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,

xx **1 John 5:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

xxi **Luke 16:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.

xxii **Matthew 19:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

xxiii **Romans 10:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

xxiv **1 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)**

⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

xxv **2 Corinthians 1:4 (ESV)**

⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

xxvi **Ecclesiastes 3:2 (ESV)**

² a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

xxvii **Ecclesiastes 3:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

xxviii **Romans 8:32 (ESV)**

³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?