

Introduction: We've come to a great chapter of the Bible, which we're going to get to peer into over the next 3 Sundays. A common thread you'll notice is: each account shines with a slightly different feature about Jesus' Word... each, in turn, giving us a different piece of the evidence of why we should trust in him as our God and Lord.

- To begin, at vs.1-10 ...featured are His Word of grace & of authority.
- Next week in Vs.11-17 ...We'll view His Word of Compassion & of Life.
- In vs.36-50... we'll wrap up the chapter by hearing Jesus' Word of Forgiveness & of defense (of fierce love)

Read: Luke 7:1-10 ¹ When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. ³ The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵ because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." ⁶ So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ 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." ⁹ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." ¹⁰ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

We are surrounded by a world which says: "you deserve to have..." See if this short video clip sums up the messages our world sends [about 1 minute]. Script:

"I obey my thirst. I have it my way. I just do it. **I deserve** a break today. I double my pleasure, double my fun. I live the high life because **I'm worth it**. I'm looking out for number 1. I wait for nothing. I have a million choices – I get what I want. I do what's best for me. I spend my time where I want to spend it. No one wastes it – but me. I have the world at my finger tips. ... If I'm unhappy, I'm missing something. I find it. I buy it. If I want it, I get it. I accumulate. I collect. I acquire. I take. I use. I devour. I consume. I am not the center of the universe – but I am the center of mine. I want to know what's in it for me. I want to know what I get out of it. I'm here to find happiness. I live for comfort. I exist to be served. The world exists to serve me. I am the customer – the customer is king – I am king."

You heard it once in there very specifically, and I think the message permeates throughout: "you deserve all that!"

This falls right into line with so much of what is offered in the spiritual realm as well. The religious world has many voices calling out: "You've been good. . . you've done good things for others. . . You deserve to have God be good to you in return."

Then life in this not-so-perfect world smacks us in the face ~ and it hurts. "Ouch! I didn't deserve that!" Doubts and questions may be directed toward God: "Why is this bad thing happening... I don't deserve this!"

You see: Our world and our sinful flesh have the audacity to believe that God is indebted to us. Why? They suggest: "because we've sacrificed *so much* for him – we've served him in a long list of ways!"

In our account for today, the local religious leaders had come to Jesus basically saying: "This honorable man's servant is sick. He is such a great guy ~ so different from all those other 'gentiles' ~ he actually built a synagogue for us, God's people. So he deserves to have you help him. You owe it to him to answer his request."

The centurion, however, has plenty to say in contrast to that. His words are a powerful sermon to some of the church leaders of that day... and today. Listen to the centurion preach, because his sermon counters the ideas that spill out from your own heart... and mine.

Faith, pouring out in honest confession, drowns all sinful thoughts of entitlement (as if God owes us anything) in a flood of humble repentance. The Roman Centurion expressed that he was not even worthy to come to Jesus, or to have Jesus come to him. You see...

He obviously had an accurate view of himself before God – he recognized his complete unworthiness to even stand in Jesus' presence. Why? He realized that he would not only be in the presence of greatness, but in the presence of perfection. He knew the truth that we – humans – so often try to hide from ourselves: "Lord, I don't deserve to have you do anything for me. I am completely unworthy, a sinner."

This is why we take upon our lips the same type of honest confession as the centurion, every time we say "I am by nature sinful. I have sinned against you – Lord – in my thoughts, words and actions. And I do not deserve to be called your child." In those words, we're expressing a true view of ourselves.

But Christian confession doesn't stop there. Because we truly understand the treachery and the deception that lies within the human nature, we look totally away from self ~ to God's power and God's promise of Grace. "Trusting in my Savior Jesus Christ I pray: Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Faith looks to God's word of grace ~ so well spoken earlier in Galatians: "*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age*" (ch.1). This same news resounding through God's recorded history is what enabled Solomon hundreds of years earlier to express in prayer such confidence: that the Lord would hear from heaven the prayers of believers (from every nation), and answer (1 Kings 8). "*Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need*" (Hebrews 4:16).

This is why as believers in Jesus we bring our requests confidently to our Lord. We have been brought to *know* the One who left perfection in Heaven to painstakingly live every second of his life perfectly in our place. The One who allowed himself to be struck with staggering suffering, *our* punishment ~ hell, so we through faith in him can be in paradise.

And so we come into God's house, like today. And we call on him, our Savior, while our hearts sing with his peace. We go home, and we pray: "Be our guest, Lord, at our table – in our home." And we're glad to know his reply: "Surely I'm with you always."

But the Roman centurion made a different request of our Lord: "*Please, don't come into my home, Lord.*" And when all was said and done Jesus didn't set foot under the centurion's roof... not because the centurion was a gentile and not good enough for the Lord. No. His prayer and Jesus' response show us just how much he understood about who Jesus is and what he is able to do.

Note what the centurion's words reveal about his view of Jesus. We've already talked about one important point. Let's move on to another. As a military man, he understands what it's like to be under authority. He knows from experience what happens when he issues orders to those under him. He doesn't have to be present to know that his command will be carried out. He just has to say the word – those under him will do what he says.

And so... just think what he is expressing about Jesus. He in effect says: "Jesus, I know you have authority and power over sickness, over our human bodies – your power goes beyond that of a doctor, for you can create healing simply by speaking the Word." That's like saying: "Jesus you prove you have all the qualities of God. That's who you are."

What a statement of faith: "just say the word, for your word is the power of God."

And Jesus is "amazed." There are only two times in the Gospels that we see Jesus pointing to a person and saying: this person has exhibited great faith. We've got one of the two right here.

But please don't let that divert your attention: don't set your eyes on the faith of the Centurion, rather look & turn & give all attention to Jesus. Our Lord drops everything – vs.6 - as if he had no other plans... as if he had no other place he could be, no other task more important. Our Lord stops on the spot - vs.9-10 -, answers the prayer, the servant is healed from that instant!

This is comforting to us, because... He's ready to hear our prayers. He's ready to help us in our every need.

Note: our Lord has already dropped everything to take care of your greatest need. His work to save you is completed. And that faith you have in Jesus ~ it didn't just appear out of nowhere. And it wasn't in you to begin with. The Holy Spirit, our Lord – the Giver of life – breathed life into your soul. Now He carefully tends your faith ~ keeping it alive through the living Word of God.

His Word of grace and power are at work in baptism. It may look like simple drops of water, sprinkled upon the head - a tear-jerker of a ceremony - an event that makes for a good first photo shoot. But be careful. Don't underestimate its power. It's not a mere tradition. It's not a commitment or promise one makes to God. Here is the power of God, giving the command to sin and Satan to give up any claim on our soul. He places his name upon us and transforms a condemned slave to sin into royalty / heirs of Heaven.

And take the Lord's Supper. His Word of grace and power are here. It's not just a happy little gathering ~ meant to show acceptance between people ~ like a ceremony of friendship. It is Jesus loving you so much, that He gives you the greatest thing ~ He gives Himself. God's Word takes the humble elements of bread and wine and gifts you with the very body and the lifeblood of Jesus Himself! Given for you, for your forgiveness.

Yes, featured here today are Jesus' Word of Grace and of Power. He comes to you with forgiveness and strength, with His powerful love that cares for you and promises to keep you close.

Take this sermon from the centurion home, and page back to it often, in order to remember the important truths the centurion humbly lived: "I am unworthy. But your power is everything, Lord." Then page forward in your Bible to the last couple chapters of Luke's gospel, where another Roman Centurion finds his way into the record of Jesus' life. This time, unlike in Luke ch.7, the Centurion and Jesus meet face to face. But not in a home, rather under the opened-air, darkened-sky scene at Golgotha. There's striking symmetry, however, to be heard in the words of the two Roman centurions. Once again, the truths of Jesus' holiness and Jesus' power – his identity as God the Son is attested: "Surely this was a righteous man" & "Surely this man was the Son of God." And he still is. Risen and ascended: trust in his grace, trust in his power.