

That's What I call Faith!

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[0 : 0 0] If you have a Bible, if you turn back with me to the passage that Rosie read to us in Luke chapter 7, if you hear last Sunday we looked at Horses Church, why we go to church from Acts 2 and I said that was probably the passage that I preached from most in my life, that Acts 2 is a passage I keep coming back to again and again. And we've gone to the opposite extreme that Luke 7, 1 to 10 I've never preached on before. In fact it's probably one of these passages that I didn't really know particularly well. Two or three weeks ago we were on holiday and we were visiting a different church and the minister took this as his text that Sunday and something that he said kind of triggered something in me to go and look at it more. So hopefully this is not plagiarism but some of this is actually reasonably original although if you want to check you can tell me if you were visiting us today. But this text foremost is a pointer, it tells us what true faith is like, what is Christian faith. And interestingly the central character is not a Jewish believer, he's a Gentile but he's a Gentile who has understood who Jesus is. And through understanding who Jesus is he then exercises a remarkable amount of faith. Even Jesus in this passage remarks that this man's faith was amazing. And I just want to very briefly this morning look at three or four different characteristics of what this faith looked like for this man and maybe should look like for us today. Look at verses 1 to 2 when Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening he entered Capernaum there the centurion servant whose master valued highly was sick and about to die. Jesus according to Luke had just finished the sermon on the mount and he enters Capernaum a place that he'd been probably many times before which is on the north west shore of the lake of Galilee. And while he's in this town village presumably preaching the message somebody approaches him a group of people approach him on behalf of this Roman centurion. A centurion was fairly commonplace within the Roman army and I suppose he would be roughly the equivalent of a major within the British army today. He had about a hundred people who he was responsible for who he commanded and he also was then had to be under authority of those above him. We're told that one of these servants or a servant was particularly ill at this time. The word servant perhaps is slightly the wrong picture. Depending on your age if we say the word servant you probably think of either upstairs or downstairs or if you're slightly more young and trendy you think of downtown Abbey and you think of all the people that used to serve and clean the houses. Actually what we have here is a slave almost certainly the Roman centurion would have slaves who he had bought in the marketplace to look after his household. Slaves within the Roman structure were the lowest of the low. Your intention was you bought them you

worked them they died you bought another slave. There was no real emotional attachment to them or certainly that is normally the case. So this is a very unusual thing for someone to be concerned about one of his slaves goes against the norm. You can leave the same account in Matthew and in Matthew verse chapter eight verse six. Matthew uses the interesting term of a young child and some commentators think this is not only a slave but it's one of the slaves children who is actually ill and again it puts it in a different picture. We're told in this passage that the Roman centurion loved Israel. It wasn't obviously his place that he was born. Again as we're aware the Roman army had conquered Israel and occupied Israel and they were hated by most of the Jews. The Jewish people were not easy people to keep under control. They used to have revelation after revelation to take out the Roman Empire without much success. But what is evident is that this man cared deeply about this young servant. He was out of his social norm. He crossed racial ethnic social barriers when he went to appeal to the Gentiles to go and ask Jesus to help him. This man to summarise it loved people who weren't like himself. Don't know about you but I'm not particularly good sometimes at loving very many people. I'm best at loving people who are similar to me who have my similar background similar interests. I can just about get along with them but put me into a

different situation where the people who are maybe very different maybe Glaswegians I don't know something like that. It's less easy to love them. But true faith true gospel faith breaks down all social barriers. We're told that there will be no

Greek no Jew no slave within Christ's world Christ's kingdom. And I wonder who are the people that we struggle with to love. Who are the people that we struggle with to share the gospel with. Is that a particular race particular social background particular belief or system. But if we have true faith in Christ there is no barrier to who we share our faith with. And so the centurion decides to risk his reputation by going to the Jews to ask them to go to Jesus. And so the story unfolds in verses three and five. Again we need to understand that the Jewish elders had little love for the Romans and in particular the

Jewish leaders did absolutely despise and hate most Roman soldiers. They want occupational force. They tax them. They beat them. They held them in a very bad understanding and light. And yet this Roman centurion must have been very different because we read that the elders of the synagogue were willing to approach Jesus on his behalf. The elders not only bring the man's request but we write a recommendation they write for their gentle friend. We argue that he's a man of integrity that he's well liked by the Jews that he is worthy of Jesus's help. Verse three says the elders when we approach Jesus said for he loves our nation and he is built a synagogue. The Roman army want stupid and they encourage the Jewish people to worship and they understood it their God. It was almost a way of controlling them as Karl Marx put it religion is the opium of the people. And so the Roman empire was very happy for Jewish people to worship because it meant they weren't doing other things.

But they themselves had their own God and weren't involved in Jewish worship. But through God's providence this man had come to obviously some understanding of Yahweh God. He was part of the worship. This man had given money to build the new synagogue in Capernaum. Now the Gentiles were barred from the temple in Jerusalem. They couldn't worship there. But they were welcoming to any synagogue to listen to the word of God that had been taught. So in the time and place the Sintoion lived the way that God was using mostly the way that God was using the people to understand who he was. The way that God used before the church was there was through the synagogue was through the rabbi preaching and teaching. He understood what God was trying to do in his world. As we looked at last Sunday morning and we came to understand that primarily God will use the church locally to bring about his purposes in this world. And yet if you went out onto a royal mile, if you went to your workplace, if you went to your neighbour, most people would not see the church as relevant at all in 21st century Edinburgh. Most people would see it as a building you come into to take photos of or a place that you go to be married or buried. Chases of church is a place of hypocrites, a place where you either have to be good or old to come into. And collectively we've done something over the last number of years, over the last century. We almost need a new PR company to come in and rebrand and resell the church because people have misunderstood you don't have to be good, you don't have to be a hypocrite, you don't have to be old to come to church far from it. Those of you who are regular attenders, as I said last Sunday, the Brunchfield City Group are moving towards a church plant in the Brunchfield area. And over the last few months we've been having fun trying to come up with a name for the new church. And some of them have been interesting and some of them have been quite ridiculous. But the best one that I think I'd like to suggest now to new and to the leaders is we should call ourselves sinners saved by grace. Because that's what we are. That's if you like the name of the tin. All of us here this morning are sinners.

[12:15] But if we know Christ we're saved by grace. And all of us to some extent are aware of what God is doing in his world. As we remember the example of a centurion I need to ask myself what is it that God is doing here at St Columbus at this time? Or if you were visitor what is God doing in your church and fellowship at this time? And are you excited about it?

Does it matter to you? Are you enthusiastic? Are you involved in it? Church is not a spectator sport. You just watch. You have to be to be part of the church actively involved in it.

So we move to verses 6 and 7. And I think the third thing we can see here is that we have a man who has great humility of Christ. You see we're not only impressed by this man's great love for his servant but we see in these verses his great humility. The passage reveals two essential components of Christian faith. The first we find in verse 6. See before Jesus could reach his house the centurion sent a second representative to Jesus. To tell him a kind of PS or by the way you

don't actually have to come to my house to do the healing.

Now I'm sure he did this for a number of reasons but probably the predominant reason was that he understood Jewish custom. He understood that if Jesus stepped into his house Jesus would be then seen as unclean and wouldn't be able to go to the synagogue to carry on with worship and teaching. And he didn't want to put Jesus in that position. As a Gentile he respected Jesus. He understood what Jesus was about unlike many of the Jewish leaders.

Now as a centurion he had a considerable influence and power. But we see here a man who has power but is humble. He understood authority and he understood Jesus authority in this situation. [15:02] He doesn't ask for a sign. He doesn't even ask for Jesus to come to his house. All he says is will you make my servant well? Will you heal him? He understood authority but he was humble with it. And so the story continues in verses 7b to 8. You see the centurion apparently realised that the one who had power of life and death could heal with a word but it had to be God who did it and only God that could do it. If Christ is divine then even as a Gentile he could see a miracle happen. He was willing to fall on his knees and submit to his divine authority. All Jesus had to do was save a word and he believed that it would be done. Now it's interesting there's no evidence within the rest of the crypt so this man had ever met Jesus. He probably heard about him, heard about his teaching and he believed it and he made a request based on what he heard and understood of Jesus. Jesus promised a special blessing on people like the centurion. When Jesus appeared to Thomas and removed all his doubts and proved that he had rose from the dead he said in John 20:29, blessed are they who have not yet seen and yet believed. You see the blessing extended to the centurion and to every believer today. The word also in verse 8 that we see the officer saw a parallel between the way that he commanded his people under his command and the way that

Jesus commanded the disease. If this Roman with very little spiritual instruction had that kind of faith in God how much greater those of us that live close to the cross, close to the resurrection with a whole of scripture how great should our faith be.

I said a few minutes ago that church is filled of sinners saved by grace but we have the faith to believe that Jesus does transform and change lives. Wonder this morning perhaps you've come for many years to this church or perhaps you're just visiting but deep down you say well that's all very well for the person sitting next to me but if only you knew what I had done. If only you knew my story you wouldn't say that. But see the centurion came and had faith because he believed and understood who Jesus was. The hymn writer puts it this way, the vilest offender who truly believes that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. I wonder have you got assurance this morning? Do you know where you're going?

Do you have a faith to believe that Jesus will hold you and protect you whatever happens? Paul says in Romans everyone who calls in the name of the Lord will be saved. Or the apostle John says I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. For Paul and for John there was no uncertainty about their faith. They wanted the believers to understand that when you accept Christ as your saviour and Lord then nothing can take you away from the Lord Jesus Christ.

I wonder perhaps this morning you've been holding back from being involved in your fellowship or involved in this fellowship. Perhaps you say well I've got to reach a certain standard before I can take communion or I've got to reach a certain standard before I get involved in some activity or some line of service. Or perhaps you say well yeah okay but I'm not as good as dot dot dot. But the Romans insurion wasn't perfect. He wasn't Jewish. He wasn't a believer as far as we're aware but he believed in Jesus and he became a believer and then he got involved. In verse 9 we see the reaction of Jesus. It says when he marveled at him and turned around and said to the crowd I say to you I have not found such great faith not even in Israel. You see the man's faith amazed Jesus but it came from a Gentile. He marveled at the Romans insuring whose background and circumstances ought to have made it more difficult for him to have faith. A man whose occupation prized him being big, bad and tough. A man who was steeped in paganism. A man who should have hated the [20:56] Jews. Yet in spite of everything. A man who stood and asked Jesus in faith to help him.

I wonder whatever your background whether you've been in church or your life or this is your first time. Whether you've known Jesus for decades or you're still trying to work out who he is. Do you have the faith to believe that Jesus can not only save you but change you and transform you. Interesting in Luke's account right at the end of verse 10. Almost as an afterthought he says those

who sent returned to the house and found the servant well who had been sick. The healing took place. You see actually the healing for Jesus wasn't the priority. The priority was the man's faith in him. You see none of us can do miracles. It's Jesus who does it. None of us can see people that are in a family or at workplace or friends come to faith. It's Jesus who does it. But what will ask to be do is to have faith to believe that Jesus can and will do it. And that faith should motivate us to pray and to worship and to serve. Not out of a duty but out of the knowledge that we are saved by grace and grace alone. You know the teaching of Jesus. If you've got the faith of a mustard seed then you can move mountains. My prayer for myself, my prayer for us collectively this morning is that through this week and beyond we would put that faith into action and we would see God do miraculous things for his glory and for his honour. Amen.

Let's pray to God. Father we thank you for scripture, for its relevance for us today.

Although we live in a very different time and culture we thank you that you still through your Holy Spirit speak to us. Thank you for the centurion. Thank you for his faith and for the outworking of that faith in practice. Father we pray that you would help us first and foremost to know you as our Savior and Lord. Help us to have assurance that if we call in your name you will save us. Thank you that you don't call us to judge ourselves against anyone else but you see us as individuals loved by you, special to you, cared by you.

Father we pray that you would give us faith, authentic faith as we seek to honour you and glorify you. We pray that you would continue to work through this church here at St Columbus and with other fellowships so that your name would be glorified. Father forgive us when we feel we have all the answers. Forgive us when we feel that we are better or worse than anyone else. Help us not to judge ourselves by that standard but only through your love and your mercy and your grace. We ask that you would help us to go from this place in a faith in you because you are the God who we seek to worship and love and we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.