

## Does he really deserve it?

Bible Reading: Luke 7:1-10

Message: Luke 7:4-5, "Does he really deserve to have Jesus do this for him?"

In 6:17 Jesus began the sermon on the plain – and like the Sermon on the Mount, it laid the foundation for his lordship. He declares blessing and curse; he set forth the high call to obedience: love your enemy. Finally, he identified himself as the Lord and judge before whom one day all must appear - so build your house on the rock.

Luke tells us that after that sermon, Jesus returned to Capernaum and the elders of Jesus' home church come and challenge his lordship. Here's how it goes. A centurion, a roman military officer with 100 soldiers under his command, was stationed in Capernaum. A savant whom he valued was ill and in danger of dying. The elders pleaded earnestly with Jesus to come and heal him. If they stopped there, that would have been fine, but Luke reports what they added: "This man deserves to have you do this because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

He deserves to have Jesus do this. Well if he deserves it, then Jesus is under obligation to the centurion. The Centurion has done a favour for the Jewish people in Capernaum, and Jesus is a resident of this town, so Jesus owes it to the centurion. If I owe someone something, then that person has something over me. They couldn't just ask Jesus to do this. They wanted to force Jesus to do it. They wanted Jesus to pay their debt. They wanted to use his divine power of their own benefit.

So it might surprise you to read that Jesus went with them. It is an example of condescension. This is the time of his humiliation. Jesus is not treated as Lord but as a servant. Soon the glory of his lordship will be revealed. But not yet. So he went with them.

Jesus own people used him for their own purposes, but the centurion had a totally different attitude – he had the highest regard for the Lord Jesus. While Jesus and the elders were travelling to the centurion's house, news of their coming swiftly came to the centurion. Immediately he dispatched some friends with this message, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you."

John the Baptist had said of Jesus that he is not worthy even to untie the thong of his sandal. This centurion has a similar sense of awe and humility toward Jesus. He knows that if he should receive anything from him, he could only beg him for mercy. He had nothing over Jesus to oblige him. Nothing he had was worthy of the Lord.

And that's saying quite a lot for he is a military man. He knows about power and authority. He commands a soldier to go and he goes, and another to come and he comes simply because he has commanded it. He knows that Jesus has power to do the same. But Jesus has power over all things, even diseases. He could command a disease to come or to go and it would obey – like God who commands light to shine and it shines, stars to form in the universe and they do. In other words, he recognizes that in Jesus lies divine power and authority. And the man who exercise divine authority and power, is Lord.

This recognition deeply amazed Jesus. That's what verse 9 says: "When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled". He did not expect it for his own people did not see this in Jesus. The Centurion does not love this nation as much as he loves this nation's God and humbles himself before him, and though he is powerful man, he begs on

God's power like a child asks for mercy from an adult. That impressed Jesus. Not even in Israel had he seen such faith.

Do you see the important lesson in this? What makes you great in God's eyes is when you make yourself small before him, when you humble yourself, God loves you and he cannot stop himself from bending down to pick you up; the more you humble yourself, the more richly he pours out his blessings on you.

Isaiah the prophet puts this point very nicely in chapter 57: "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: 'I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.'"

The humble person comes before him and says, like the centurion: I fear to have God come to my house for I am a sinful person, but I need his mercy and his blessing. I fear him because of what a low person I am, but I desire him because of who he is in Jesus Christ. To such a one God gives the power to be bold and to cry out, "Abba Father. Bless me. Save me. Be near to me. Comfort me. Strengthen me. Love me." For he gives the Holy Spirit to those he loves.

The church does not deserve this from God. Nobody does. You need God. We all need him. But let us go to him like the centurion went to Jesus – with a humble heart and a lowly spirit. If you do that, you will amaze God. Yes, you can amaze God by bowing before him and asking, without demanding, without thinking you deserve something from God. You will amaze him. And he will amaze you. Yes he will. He will amaze you with his love and mercy.