



“iBelieve”
Luke 7:1-10

Idea: Real faith is an exercise in reality.

Intro: Legend has it that a man was lost in the desert, just dying for a drink of water. He stumbled upon an old shack – a decrepit, windowless, roofless, weather-beaten old shack. He looked about this place and found a little shade from the heat of the desert sun. As he sat there glancing around, he saw a pump about fifteen feet away – an old, rusty water pump. He stumbled over to it, grabbed the handle, and began to pump up and down, up and down. Nothing came out.

Disappointed, he staggered back. Then he noticed off to the side an old jug. He looked at it, wiped away the dirt, and read a message that said, “You have to prime the pump with all the water in this jug, my friend. P.S.: Be sure you fill the jug again before you leave.”

He popped the cork out of the jug and sure enough, it was almost full of water! Suddenly, he was faced with a decision. If he drank the water, he could live. Ah, but if he poured all the water in the old rusty pump, maybe it would yield fresh, cool water from down deep in the well, all the water he wanted. He studied the possibility of both options. What should he do, pour it into the old pump and take a chance on fresh, cool water or drink what was in the old jug and ignore its message? Should he waste all the water on the hopes of those flimsy instructions written, no telling how long ago?

Reluctantly, he poured all the water into the pump. Then he grabbed the handle and began to pump...squeak, squeak, squeak. Still nothing came out! Squeak, squeak, squeak. A little bit began to dribble out, then a small stream, and finally it gushed! To his relief fresh, cool water poured out of the rusty pump. Eagerly, he filled the jug and drank from it. He filled it another time and once again drank its refreshing contents.

Then he filled the jug for the next traveler. He filled it to the top, popped the cork back on, and added this little note: “Believe me, it really works. You have to give it all away before you can get anything back.”

This story depicts the exercise of faith. Describing what faith is, Leighton Ford has said, “Christian faith is more than a dogma. It does not just say, ‘I believe,’ but says, ‘I believe and, therefore, I obey!’” Ford did not land on this understanding of faith on his own. The Bible presents the concept of faith in this manner. The passage that most explicitly describes faith is Hebrews 11.

Read Hebrews 11:1-2.

Hebrews 11 both defines and portrays for us what faith is. In each and every account, faith was validated by obedience. Noah received warning about the flood waters of judgment, and he moved to construct the ark. Abraham heard the call of God to go out, and he obeyed by leaving his home for the promise land. Moses left Egypt, seeing by faith Him who is invisible. The men and women of Hebrews 11 demonstrated real faith. From them we learn that real faith is an exercise in reality. They rightly saw themselves, their situations, and the Lord's Word. The same is true of the centurion who lived in Capernaum. Faced with the reality of his servant's terminal condition, this centurion chose to believe in and on Jesus.

Inquiry: Luke 7 covers five scenes in Jesus' ministry. In them we see the Lord interacting with humanity in the most profound and the most ordinary circumstances. In the first scene, Jesus goes to the sickbed of a slave owned by a Roman centurion (vs. 1-10). In the second scene, the Lord meets a funeral procession with a grieving widow who has lost her only son (vs. 11-17). Then He receives a question from John the Baptist who is imprisoned and suffering with doubt (vs. 18-23). The fourth scene features a conversation between the Lord and the crowds traveling with Him (vs. 24-35). Then the chapter ends with Jesus visiting a Pharisee's house, where a sinful woman washes His feet with her hair and tears (vs. 36-50).

These five scenes present five different windows by which we are to see who Jesus is. We also see through them how the people involved responded to Jesus. In them we will discover that Jesus is kind and a friend to sinners. He is One whom we should believe on in faith.

Read Luke 7:1-10.

In this story, Jesus has again come to Capernaum, the headquarters of his ministry. This situation takes place not long after finishing His teaching on the plain. As Jesus is getting settled, elders from the synagogue show up and ask Him to come and help a Roman centurion. This Gentile sent the Jews, choosing to believe in and on Jesus. He exercised real faith that was grounded in the reality of the situation. Jesus' love and grace are also on full display as He goes to the terminally sick servant, and we learn from the centurion what faith involves and requires.

Centurions were common throughout the Roman Empire. They were equivalent in rank to a modern-day Army captain and normally commanded one hundred soldiers. Death was also common throughout the Roman Empire. The average lifespan was about half of what it is in our world today. Along with that, Roman soldiers were known for their use of force and brutality, but this centurion was different. He loved his servant who was dying. Slaves were not ordinarily valued by their masters in the Roman Empire, but this centurion not only valued him, but he also highly valued him. The centurion, likewise, loved his subjects. He personally paid for the synagogue to be constructed in Capernaum as the elders testified (vs. 5).

When the centurion learned of Jesus, he sent the elders to Jesus, asking for His help in healing the servant. In doing so, this man was saying, "I believe." This statement of the heart needs to be exercised by each of us as we place our faith in and on Jesus. Let's take a look at what faith involves and requires.

Faith Involves:

- A humble recognition of Jesus' power.
We do not know if this man had ever sat under Jesus' teaching or watched Him heal others. The text does seem to clearly indicate that the two had never personally met. What is obvious is that he had heard of Jesus' teaching and miracles. He heard the stories of the demon-possessed man being set free in Capernaum. Perhaps, he had spoken to some of the people who had been healed by Jesus in Simon's house (4:40). Therefore, as soon as the centurion learned that Jesus had returned to Capernaum, he sent the elders to ask Jesus to come and heal the servant (vs. 3).

Why would a Roman centurion ask for Jesus' help? As a Roman officer, he would have had access to Rome's best medical care. As a pagan, one would have expected him to reject the Palestinian phenom as just another fanatic. It is likely the centurion had probably already exhausted all his options. Roman medicine had not cured the servant. His Roman gods also had not been able or willing to heal the servant. The religious curiosity of the centurion had also brought him to a place of acceptance. He might best be described as a "God-fearer." The man had not become a proselyte, but he did fear God and had acted favorably toward His people.

This man humbly sent the elders to request Jesus' help because he had reached the point where he recognized that Jesus alone had the power to heal. As we consider what it means for us to personally declare, "I believe," we first see that it involves a recognition of Jesus' power over and in our lives.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. – Romans 1:16

Faith involves you and I recognizing that Jesus alone possesses the power through His death, burial, and resurrection to heal the brokenness in our lives caused by sin.

- A humble invitation for Jesus' presence.
Jesus was invited "to come and heal his servant" (vs 3).

The centurion knew enough about Jesus to understand that His healing power was tied to His presence, which is a little confusing. Can Jesus heal from a distance? The answer is yes. In fact, Luke does not record Jesus actually standing at the bedside of the servant because the centurion sent servants to stop Him before entering the house. He believed himself to be unworthy of Jesus being in his house.

Jesus possesses all power; therefore, He can do anything. He spoke the cosmos into existence with just a word, so it is nothing for Him to speak a word and someone on the other side of the world is healed. His presence, however, is tied to His power. Jesus wants to do more in the lives of people than heal their infirmities. He wants to heal their souls. He desires to cleanse their sin and renew their relationship with God the Father. This transformation happens through relationship and not religion. In religion, man seeks to appease God from a distance. In relationship, Jesus makes man right with God up close and personal.

This man humbly invited Jesus to come to his home. He knew he needed more than religious actions, he needed a personal relationship with the one who could heal. As we consider what it means for us to personally declare, "I believe," we see that it also involves an invitation for Jesus' presence.

Faith involves you and I inviting Jesus into our lives as Lord and Savior to heal the brokenness in our lives caused by sin.

- A humble conviction of Jesus' authority.
Read Luke 7:6-8.

This Roman centurion accepted something about Jesus that many of His disciples had not. He referred to Jesus as "Lord." Others used the title in reference to Jesus, but according to the Lord's final words in the Sermon on the Plain, calling Jesus Lord must also include obedience to His commands (6:46). By using this title, the centurion conveyed an understanding of two things: He knew he was not personally worthy before the Lord, and he knew the power of Jesus' word.

The centurion understood that part of what it means to call Jesus Lord is to admit His authority over one's life. For this reason, he asked Jesus to simply speak a word and his servant would be healed (vs. 7). As a man of authority he was keenly aware of the authority that is in the spoken word. This man possessed a humble conviction of Jesus' authority over his life. He is Lord. As we consider what it means for us to personally declare, "I believe," we see that it involves a conviction of Jesus' authority.

Faith involves you and I believing that Jesus has authority as Lord and Savior to heal the brokenness in our lives caused by sin.

Faith involves these three aspects, which leads us to two requirements.

Faith Requires:

- Rightly seeing oneself.
Before the seventeenth century and the invention of the microscope, when people looked at a lake, pond, or a glass of water, they judged it clean if they could see through it clearly. This judgment changed in 1674 when the Dutchman Leeuwenhoek filled a glass vial with water and began curiously looking at it through his newly acquired microscope. In that experiment, he discovered there were "very many small animalcules" in what was previously thought to be clean water.

When we turn to the microscope of God's Word, we discover that what might have been perceived as clean is in fact filled with all sorts of animalcules. We are, in fact, sick with sin. The centurion rightly saw himself as unworthy to be in the presence of Jesus. In the same way, we ought to rightly see our own sin and sinfulness. We dare not think that we are not "that bad." We dare not compare ourselves to "big sinners." No, we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom 3:23).

Faith requires you and I seeing ourselves rightly. We must look through the lens of God's Word. There we will find that God is holy and man is evil and condemned accordingly.

- Rightly seeing Jesus.
The centurion rightly saw Jesus as Lord and Savior. He saw in Him grace and truth. He saw in Him love and compassion. This man believed Jesus would come to him and heal the servant because He was good. He did not believe Jesus would come because he had done something good and worthy of Jesus' blessing. He saw Jesus' holiness and righteousness and juxtaposed it over and against his sinfulness. He saw that the grace of the Lord was greater than his sin.

He called upon Jesus as Lord and believed Him to be the Savior who would heal the brokenness caused by sin (vs. 6).

Conclusion: In response to this man's words, Jesus marveled. He stated that nowhere in Israel had He found such faith (vs. 9). We find Jesus' marveling over something only twice in Scripture. The first time He marveled it was over the Jews rejection of Him in his hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30). The second time it was over the centurion's belief in Him. Which camp are you in today?

Do you see Jesus for who He is? Are you trusting and obeying Him as Lord and Savior? Faith is an interesting thing. It requires complete obedience to the instructions and a willingness to go all in. What would have happened to the man lost in the desert if he had decided to drink the water rather than using it to prime the pump? What if he had drunk half and used half to prime the pump? Well, the answer is simple. The pump would not have produced the cool and refreshing water that was available. What did it take to get the water? It took faith to believe the words on the jug and a willingness to obey.

Today, all that God's Word promises is available to you and me if we will believe and obey them. That is what faith is. It is an exercise in reality as we rightly see ourselves and rightly see Christ. What do you need to believe God for today?

- Your marriage?
- Your finances?
- Your health?
- Your future?
- A relationship?
- Freedom from a besetting sin?
- Salvation?

Good news: God loves you. He created you and desires to know you.

Bad news: You are a sinner in rebellion against your Creator.

Best news: God has done everything necessary to justly deal with your sin and bring forgiveness and restoration to your life. Today, He calls you to turn from your sin and self and turn to Him as Savior and Lord. Do you need to be forgiven?