

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Sharpening Discipleship's Focus

(Learning from the Gospel of Luke)

Great [by FAITH] Expectations!

(A bunch of passages in Luke; emphasis on Luke 7:1-10)

Study #4

Introduction: About faith...

God gives eternal life to the one who believes in Jesus. A relationship with God begins with faith in Jesus.

Building on that fundamental truth, the Apostle Paul says that just as we began to live in Christ by faith, so we are to keep on living in Christ by faith. (Colossians 2:6-7)

Living by faith is the life of Jesus' disciple, and in these weeks, we're thinking together about elements of the life of discipleship.

We've spent a week each exploring prayer and power. Today, we're looking into the Gospel of Luke to learn about the life of faith.¹

Accepting your Savior's challenge to discipleship means that you are choosing to lead a life of faith. You are deciding to live in light of a kingdom you haven't seen. You are trusting and even expecting Him to do the life-changing, soul-saving things that only He can do.

Luke's Gospel provides tremendous insight into the life of faith. I've learned a lot about faith in recent weeks as I've been reading Luke.

¹ The author of the letter to the Hebrews gives us the only definition of faith I know of in the Bible. *[11:1] Now faith is the certainty of things hoped for, a proof (or, conviction) of things not seen.*

The process for today is to start off getting sort of an overview of Jesus' thoughts about the life of faith. Then, we'll do a deep dive into one episode in Jesus' life that highlights faith.

Our first look into Luke's Gospel takes us to a scene where Jesus was giving pointed instructions to His disciples.

A Crisis of Faith (Luke 17:1-6)

Jesus Gave Instructions (vv. 1-4)

He warned against being stumbling blocks (vv. 1-2)

[17:1] And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! [2] It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.

This very severe language. And Jesus used severe language for good reason.

He was warning against false teaching. False teaching is dangerous because some - especially younger believers - will believe the lies of the false teacher and will stop following Jesus.

Jesus warning His own disciples to never teach anything other than what is true about Himself, about God and His ways, about following Him.

I'm sure the Twelve were sobered by the warning.

But Jesus wasn't finished. He followed up that warning with another serious bit of instruction.

He told His disciples to forgive repenting brothers (vv. 3-4)

[3] Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, [4] and if he sins against you

seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

Jesus was picturing life in the faith community that would form among those who would follow Him. It's a picture of life in the church.

After warning them to pay attention to themselves ("*Be self-aware! Be on your guard! Be situationally aware! Have your wits about you!*"), he commanded forgiveness, one of the high-water marks of discipleship.

By all means rebuke a brother (or a sister) if you are aware that they are sinning. That's the loving thing to do.

But, if that brother sins (specifically, "***if he sins against you***" - v. 4) and repents - even seven time in a single day! - forgive him every single time.

The disciples were processing that, just like you and I are processing this right now. That's a VERY high bar.

What the disciples said next shows that they took Jesus' words to heart.

Great God + Small Faith = Great Impact (vv. 5-6)

The disciples' request (v. 5)

[5] The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"

They viewed the command to forgive a repeat offender as so difficult that only an increase in their faith would allow them to obey it.

Listen to Jesus' response.

Jesus' response (v. 6)

[6] And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

Jesus said that they were thinking about faith all wrong.

The disciples didn't need great faith in God. They needed faith in a great God. A great God can do a lot with a little faith.

Forget about mulberry trees being planted in the sea. That was hyperbole to make a point.

The point is that with a little faith, God can enable obedience where it would not have been possible. God can rework an unforgiving heart and create a grace-giving, forgiving heart.

Having a tiny, mustard-seed's worth of faith is enough...if it is faith in God. God will use faith in Him to accomplish things that would never have happened had it not been for faith.

Now, that episode was late in Jesus' time with His disciples. Much earlier, Jesus had another exchange with the Twelve apostles that was revealing.

Jesus Reproved His Followers for Lack of Faith

On the Sea of Galilee (Luke 8:22-25)

At Jesus' command, He and His disciples were sailing across the Sea of Galilee. To see how exhausted Jesus was from non-stop ministry, He fell asleep on the boat.

While He was sleeping, a fierce gale swept down on them. That was not unusual on this lake, and ***[Luke 8:23] they began to be swamped and to be in danger.***

Panicked, they woke Jesus up, and cried out, ***[24] "Master, Master, we are perishing!"***

Then we read, ***[24]...He got up and rebuked the wind and the surging waves, and they stopped, and it became calm.***

The point of paying special attention to this incident is to hear Jesus' words to His disciples, post the calming the sea miracle.

[Luke 8:25] And He said to them, "Where is your faith?"²

Now, to be honest, I would have said they did pretty well here.

They called Him, "**Master!**" - twice. They called out to Him for help, showing dependence.

But this - "**Where is your faith?**" - was a reproof. Jesus was saying, "*You should be more trusting.*"³

We might not have seen the problem with their faith as soon as Jesus did. But that there was a problem with their faith was evident by their response to this demonstration of Jesus' power.

[Luke 8:25b]...But they were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, "Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?"

It seems to me that Jesus' reproof ("**Where is your faith?**") was to say that after they had recently seen...

...lots of healings and exorcisms (4:38-41);

...a miraculous catch of fish (5:1-11);

...a paralytic healed (5:17-26);

...a man healed who had a withered hand (6:6-10);

...a widow's only son raised from the dead (7:11-17),

...they should have not been "**amazed,**" that He could still a storm on the sea.

Their faith failure consisted of not putting two and two together.

They should have expected that Someone who could do all that they had seen Him do could also perform this miracle.

Not that they would be "*Ho-hum, another miracle,*" but that they would not have responded with "**amazement.**" Better to have responded with worship.

They were culpable for their lack of expectation that He would do something remarkable in the face of this dangerous storm.

We discover here that "**amazement**" isn't always a good thing. "**Amazement**" may reveal more than we wish it would about what we actually believe about Jesus and, therefore, about what we expect from Him.

And this wasn't the only time Jesus was un-impressed by His apostles' faith.

Let's look at the very end of Luke's Gospel, after the crucifixion and after Jesus' resurrection.

Post-Resurrection (Luke 24)

They would not believe the women (vv. 8-11)

Now, remember that Jesus had told these guys several times that He would be killed and raised from the dead.

But listen to the response of the disciples when the women came back from the tomb on that first Easter Sunday announcing that they had seen the risen Jesus.

[Luke 24:11] But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe the women.

Based on what Jesus had already told them, they should have expected more.

They would not believe the prophets (vv. 19-25)

² In relating this incident, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record Jesus issuing this rebuke to the apostles / disciples.

³ Darrell Bock, in his commentary.

Another faith failure occurred later on that first Easter Sunday when Jesus sat with two of the disciples (one named Cleopas; the other is not named) in the village of Emmaus.

After a lifetime of studying the Hebrew scriptures which foretold the death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah (see Isaiah 53), they weren't expecting it.

That's why Jesus said to them, ***[Luke 24:25]...“You foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!***

Given what they knew from the Bible, they should have expected more.

They would not believe their own senses (vv. 36-43)

And even later on that same day, another swing and a faith miss.

Jesus appeared to the whole group of disciples (John's Gospel tells us that Thomas wasn't present) in an upper room of a house in Jerusalem.

He asked them, ***[Luke 24:38]...“Why are you frightened, and why are doubts arising in your hearts?”***

So, Jesus took the initiative to help their faith.

[Luke 24:41] While they still could not believe it because of their joy and astonishment, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?”

So, they gave Him a piece of broiled fish to eat to prove that it was really Him and He had really been resurrected.

Disciples, even while meeting with the resurrected Jesus, did not believe. They should have done better because they knew better.

I'm certainly not saying that I would have done better had I been in their shoes. But the fact is that Luke doesn't record one word of commendation from Jesus for the vibrancy of His apostles' faith.

By way of contrast, Jesus did commend the faith of a few others.

Jesus Commended Faith

A Surprising List of Commendations for Faith

1 - The friends of a paralyzed man (Luke 5:17-26)

When some friends of a paralyzed man dragged him and his cot up on to the roof of a house in Capernaum, dug through the roof and lowered him down in front of Jesus for healing, Luke records this.

[Luke 5:20] And seeing their FAITH, He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven you.”

2 - A notoriously sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50)

When a notoriously sinful woman anointed Jesus with expensive perfume in the home of a Pharisee, Jesus said to the woman, ***[Luke 7:50]...“Your FAITH has saved you; go in peace.”***

3 - A woman who was unclean (Luke 8:43-48)

When a woman who had been ceremonially unclean for twelve long years braved a crowd and reached out to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, she was immediately cured of her hemorrhage.

[Luke 8:48] And He said to her, “Daughter, your FAITH has made you well; go in peace.”

4 - A man unclean due to leprosy (Luke 17:11-19)

When Jesus cleansed ten men of their leprosy, all of them went away to show themselves to the priest. Only one of them - a Samaritan! - returned to give thanks to Jesus for the life-changing cleansing.

[Luke 17:11-19] And He said to him, “Stand up and go; your FAITH has made you well.”

5 - A blind man (Luke 18:35-43)

And when a blind beggar on the side of a road called out, ***[Luke 18:38] “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*** Jesus asked the man what he wanted Him to do for him.

The man said, ***[41] “Lord, I want to regain my sight!”***

So, ***[Luke 18:42]...Jesus said to him, “Regain your sight; your FAITH has made you well.”***

What is striking it to notice that the only people Jesus commended for their faith were outsiders.

Some were down-and-outers, non-Jews, unclean. None of them were disciples. None of them had as much experience with Jesus as the Twelve had.

Yet they believed (think ***“mustard seed”***) and were commended for their faith.

Now, we’ll give special attention to one more man whose faith Jesus commended. Let’s see what we can learn by doing a deep dive into this story of a guy who had, according to Jesus, GREAT faith.

Remarkable Commendation for GREAT Faith (Luke 7:1-10)

Backstory: The scene in Capernaum (vv. 1-3)

This that we’re about to see took place shortly after Jesus gave the sermon that is recorded in Luke 6.⁴

Back to Capernaum (v. 1)

⁴ There are many similarities between this sermon and Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7). We commonly call this one, “The Sermon on the Plain” Luke 7:17 says that He gave it from a ***“level place.”***

[1] After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.

Jesus was raised in the city of Nazareth, out on the plains mid-way between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean.

Shortly after His baptism, He moved to Capernaum, which served as home base for most of the three years of His public ministry.

Some of His disciples lived in Capernaum and were fishermen.

Jesus finished the sermon and went back to Capernaum where there was a certain Roman centurion.

A centurion’s sadness (v. 2)

[2] Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him.

Centurions were vital officers in the Roman military machine. They were highly respected and were well paid for their service.⁵

The centurion was certainly not a Jew. He was a Gentile. He was probably not a Jewish proselyte (a convert) either. But he is the major player in this scene.

This centurion had a slave in his household whose life was hanging by a thread.⁶

The centurion held this slave in high esteem. By the words used, we could even say that he held this slave dear.⁷

⁵ There were decurions, who were leaders of ten men and chiliarchs who were over a thousand soldiers. The centurion was between them, more personal than the chiliarch and more the leader than the ducarion.

⁶ The sick man is referred to variously as a *δουλος* / slave (vv. 2, 3, 10) and as a *παις* / child. (v. 7) There is not enough evidence to say more about the man’s relationship to the centurion than to say that he was a highly valued slave.

⁷ The words ***“highly valued”*** translate a word also meaning ***“honored, respected.”*** (Greek *εντιμοσ*)

This slave was ill. Deathly ill. And the centurion devised a plan to get help for his slave from Jesus.

A centurion's plan (v. 3)

[3] When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to Him elders⁸ of the Jews, asking Him to come and heal⁹ his servant.

It's easy to understand how the centurion had "**heard about**" Jesus. Capernaum wasn't that big of a town, so word would have gotten around about His healing powers.

Plus, the centurion might have heard the sermon Jesus had just preached.¹⁰

Knowing this about Jesus, he reached out to Jesus. He took a step toward Jesus, but he did so through messengers.¹¹

It shows how highly the Jewish leaders regarded this centurion, that they would go to Jesus at his direction.¹²

And, in fact, they truly did think the world of this man, and enthusiastically lobbied Jesus to help the centurion.

⁸ The centurion sent messengers - *πρεσβυτερος*; implying Jewish civic leaders - to Jesus to seek help. Luke used a different term to refer to synagogue leaders in Acts 13:15. (Greek: *αρχισυναγωγος*)

⁹ Heal = save the life = bring someone through an ordeal; rescuing someone. Greek: *διασωζω*.

¹⁰ Bock assumes that the centurion has heard about Jesus' miracles, such as have been recorded in 4:31-44 and 5:12-26. (so, also A.B. Bruce)

¹¹ If you compare the narrative here with Matthew's telling of the same incident, you will see that the story is told differently. Matthew has the centurion personally engaging with Jesus. Luke stresses the centurion's sense of unworthiness to go to Jesus, choosing to use delegates to communicate his messages. I believe that the accounts are reconcilable, with Luke adding details that Matthew left out. Matthew related the centurion's quoted words as being said in person. This may have been an accepted way to understand a messenger reading the sender's prepared script.

¹² What is also being said here is, perhaps, that the centurion was a *strategic* friend for the Jews in Capernaum and the elders recognized the benefit they might receive if Jesus healed his slave.

Backstory: The Roman centurion's "worthiness" (vv. 4-5)

[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."

In some way and to some extent, this centurion had been a great help to the Jews in Capernaum in the construction or refurbishing or upkeep of their synagogue.¹³

Jesus was happy to help him. If anyone had thought He would be unwilling to help a Gentile, they didn't know Jesus. His compassion had no racial or ethnic boundaries.

So, [6a]...Jesus went with them.

The Jewish elders had focused on the centurion's worthiness. The centurion himself highlighted his own unworthiness in a message he sent by a delegation of his own (probably Gentile) friends to Jesus.

This centurion's faith (vv. 6b-8)

[6b...When He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord,¹⁴ do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy to have You come under my roof. [7] "Therefore I did not presume to come to You. But say the word, and let my servant be healed."

¹³ The reference to the centurion "*building*" the synagogue in Capernaum could have a range of meaning, from erecting a new synagogue, to repairing and refurbishing an existing one, to contributing to its upkeep. Bock notes that Caesar Augustus saw synagogues as valuable because they maintained order and morality. (Josephus)

¹⁴ "**Lord**" is a term of respect, not indicating that the centurion recognized Jesus as God in the flesh. He likely did not understand the concept of Jesus' Messiahship. He simply knew what he had heard and seen of Jesus - and that was enough to convince him that Jesus had the authority to heal his beloved slave.

Note how he starts: **“Lord.”** That’s a term of respect, but it does not necessarily mean that the centurion saw Jesus as God in the flesh.

Nor do I think that he saw Jesus as the Messiah or that he even understood the concept of Jewish Messiahship.

He simply knew what he had heard and seen of Jesus - and that was enough for him to expect that He could heal his beloved slave.

I envision a scenario where the centurion heard that Jesus was on His way to visit and was appalled. He never intended that Jesus should make the journey to his house.

So, as Jesus drew near to the house, the centurion sent some friends, NOT to escort Jesus to his house, but to tell Jesus that He shouldn’t / need not go to the house at all.

What we hear here are the centurion’s exact words. They are spoken as if the centurion himself was saying it.

These are words of faith and humility.

At the beginning, he knew that he wasn’t worthy to go to Jesus to ask for help. That’s why he sent the Jewish elders.

Here, he shows that he knows he isn’t worthy of receiving a personal visit from Jesus. *“Lord, don’t trouble yourself.”*¹⁵

He’s military. He understands chain-of-command and authority structures.

[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.”

¹⁵ The barrier was not the ceremonial uncleanness for a Jew coming into the home of a Gentile. The barrier was the centurion’s high view of Jesus.

The way he sees it is that he, himself, is a man under authority. He answers to Rome. He believes that Jesus was also a man under authority. He answers to God.

As a Roman officer, he has authority to give orders to those under him. In the same way, Jesus, having authority from God, must be obeyed by spiritual forces who govern health when He gives a healing command.

He believed that all that was needed for the healing of his slave was a word from Jesus - even a word given from a distance. He knew that Jesus could show His presence and power, even when absent.¹⁶

Listen to Jesus’ **“amazed”** response.

Jesus’ amazement and commendation (v. 9)

[Luke 7:9] Now when Jesus heard this, He was amazed at him,¹⁷ and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, “I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.”

Jesus called the centurion’s faith **“great.”** And of what did that greatness consist?

It was his expectation that Jesus would exercise His authority by the power of His word to do what only He could do.

The Jewish elders had pointed to the good works of the centurion. Jesus focuses only on his faith.¹⁸

And the report of the healing is added almost as an afterthought.

[10] And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.¹⁹

¹⁶ What a wonderful truth for the first readers of Luke’s gospel and for us, today. Jesus’ physical presence is not required for Him to work powerfully on our behalf.

¹⁷ Even though delivered by intermediaries, Jesus received the message as if from the centurion’s own lips. **“He was amazed at him.”**

¹⁸ Luke is less concerned with the miracle itself than with the faith of the man who requested it.

With no personal contact between Jesus and the sick slave, the slave was already healthy by the time the centurion returned. And we're not even surprised or "*amazed.*"

We expected it.

The point of recording this incident was not to emphasize Jesus' ability to heal. Everybody knew that.

The focus is the centurion's faith.

Conclusion:

Jesus says that the "*great faith*" of the centurion was better than any response He had gotten from the Jews - and it should have been the other way around.

The Jews had seen God's miraculous provision for twenty centuries. They should have been expecting the arrival of Messiah who would do the things that Jesus had been doing.

And Jesus having arrived, they should have been leading the parade of those who celebrated His authority, always expecting Him to do more.

The disciples who had witnessed His miracles should have expected way more from Jesus than this centurion did.

The question behind Jesus' commendation of the centurion was, "*Will you trust Me as the centurion has?*"

It was His question to the Jews of His day, to the disciples of His day - and to you and me today: "*Will we trust Jesus like the Roman centurion did?*"

God is delighted by our faith!

He applauds a faith that is based on what we know of His faithfulness.

Walking by faith is expecting that God will come through to empower us to fulfill the mission He has given us.

Trusting Him to do THAT is one of the foundational concepts of living in a way that pleases God and in a way that God rewards.

¹⁹ Fascinating. Luke didn't include the word of promised healing from Jesus, like Matthew did.