

Luke 7:1-10

Sermon: **The Passport**

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THE CENTURION LOVED HIS SERVANT

1 To gain a better understanding of the event before us, we will read the account in Luke as well as the one in Matthew. I believe these passages describe the same event, and by comparing the records of these two authors, we can gain a clearer picture of what truly happened — and then draw from it what is most important for us.

1.1 (**Luke 7:1–10**) When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum. Now a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave. When they came to Jesus, they earnestly implored Him, saying, 'He is worthy for You to grant this to him; for he loves our nation, and it was he who built us our synagogue.' Now Jesus started on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, 'Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof; for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant shall be healed.'

1.2 (**Matthew 8:5–13**) When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, begging Him and saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, terribly tormented.' Jesus said to him, 'I will come and heal him.' But the centurion replied, 'Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, "Go!" and he goes, and to another, "Come!" and he comes, and to my slave, "Do this!" and he does it.' When Jesus heard this, He was amazed and said to those who were following, 'Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. I say to you that many will come from east and west, and will recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' And Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed.' And the servant was healed at that very moment.

1.3 After finishing His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus returned to Capernaum. I suggested earlier that Jesus likely had His own house there, which would mean that Capernaum served as the center of His ministry. After His field missions — wherever they took place — He would usually return to this base. In this event, after coming down from the mountain, a centurion, whose servant — very dear to him — was gravely ill, decided to ask Jesus to heal him. And how did he do it? He sent Jewish elders to plead with Jesus on his behalf.

1.4 Let's go slowly here. Who was this centurion? Biblical teachers throughout history have proposed that he served in the military forces of King Herod Antipas.¹ Herod had likely modeled his army after the Roman military structure, adopting their titles — hence the term centurion, meaning a commander over about one hundred soldiers.

1.5 In the text we read that the Jewish elders told Jesus, *"He is worthy for You to grant this to him, for he loves our nation."* From this we can assume that the centurion was a Gentile. Remember, at that time the dominant religious worldview was polytheism — a religion filled with mysticism, irrational thinking, witchcraft, and meaningless rituals. Perhaps this centurion, spending more and more time within Jewish culture, began to see that their theological understanding — who God is, why this reality exists, what God's promises mean, and what He requires of humanity — actually made sense. Perhaps he began to fall in love with the moral law of Moses. Maybe he saw that the faith of Judaism was far more rational, grounded, and meaningful than anything he had previously known. Perhaps his heart began to turn toward the one true God — the God who reaches the human heart through reason, reason that understands that God calls a person to live by His righteousness, which is good, in contrast to the foolish and dark beliefs that keep humanity enslaved.

1.6 This connects with Matthew, where we read that the centurion himself pleaded with Jesus, while in Luke we see that he sent Jewish elders to intercede for him. I believe the explanation is simple: Matthew did not consider it important who personally, face to face, spoke with Jesus; his focus was that the request came from the centurion — that is, from a Gentile — and that was the theological emphasis of his account. Luke, being a historian and using Matthew's record, chose to describe the event in more detail, noting that Jewish elders were the intermediaries who spoke on behalf of the centurion. But in the end, it is the centurion himself who is truly making the plea to Jesus.

1.7 Who were the elders? They were respected leaders of the Jewish community — honest, wise, and esteemed men in their towns. They had earned their position through personal dedication and service to their people, guiding them in the way of God's righteousness. In many ways, they were lights to their communities — examples of the path each member of the people should walk. If a synagogue had no rabbi to teach and lead in the reading of God's Word, one of the elders would take that role.

1.8 Now that we know a little about the people directly connected to this event, let's return to the text. We see that the centurion loved

¹ Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great and Malthace. He ruled after his father's death, from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39, over a quarter of his father's kingdom. The Gospel of Luke (3:1 and 9:7) correctly refers to him as a tetrarch. In the New Testament, it is written that Herod Antipas married Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Herod Philip — an act strongly condemned by John the Baptist, who was executed because of it.

his servant. The question arises: was it common for a centurion — a man commanding around one hundred soldiers — to feel personal affection for his servant? I don't think so. Furthermore, would any centurion have sent Jewish elders to ask another Jew (Jesus) to heal his servant? I don't believe so. Pride and self-importance were usually obstacles in such situations. Gentiles hated Jews, just as Jews hated Gentiles. Perhaps a centurion might have done this for his child, but for a servant — unlikely. He would have been more inclined to use his authority to demand it from Jesus. But this centurion acts in complete contrast to the expectations of his culture. He sends his Jewish *friends* — whom he loves as he loves his servant.

— Through his fruits over time, he had earned the respect and affection of the Jewish people, as well as of those in his own household who lived with him on his estate. —

GOD'S WAY

2 All right, let us continue. "Sending Jewish elders to Jesus instead of going himself." This event reminds me of Jacob in the Old Testament, who sent servants ahead of him with gifts to soften the heart of his brother Esau before meeting him face to face.²

2.1 Jacob was wise in what he did — and for good reason. He had stolen his brother's blessing, and Esau was angry with him for it. Years later, when Jacob decided to return to the land of his fathers, he sent his servants ahead with great and costly gifts to calm his brother and gain his forgiveness. The story, thank God, ended well: Esau welcomed Jacob and his family with open arms.

2.2 Why do I connect this to the event in Luke? I believe the centurion's actions were meant to soften Jesus' heart. He didn't know Jesus personally, but he knew that Jesus was a Jew — and he also knew that Jews and Gentiles were not on good terms. Perhaps he thought that Jesus would not grant the request of a Gentile if he came himself, but if Jewish elders came on his behalf — maybe He would.

2.3 What wisdom and humility flow from this centurion's decision, my dear ones. This man chose to set himself aside, to abandon the tools his culture had taught him to use all his life — not for his own sake, but for the sake of his servant. In other words, just like Jacob, he chose to act in God's way.

— Personally, I believe that in this story we are dealing with an extraordinarily wise man. —

REPENTANCE, UNDERSTANDING, AND RESPECT

3 Luke 7:4–7. "He loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue." What I said earlier as a "perhaps" (see §1.5) now becomes a "certainly." What the centurion did for the Jewish people proves that the Lord was already capturing the heart and mind of this man. Did the centurion literally build the synagogue with his own hands, or did he finance its construction? We don't know. The title of centurion by itself did not bring great wealth, so it's possible that he had another profitable trade on the side or that he truly did help with his own hands. Either way, his fruits reveal a humble and discerning heart.

² Genesis 32-33

3.1 All right, let's continue with the text. "Then Jesus went with them." After hearing all this, Jesus decided to go to the centurion and grant his request. As Jesus approached the house, the centurion again sent his friends with a message: *"Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof. For this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed."* The centurion's words echo those of John the Baptist in John 1:27: *"The One who comes after me, I am not worthy to untie the strap of His sandal."* Both John the Baptist and the centurion display deep reverence, awe, and humility before the Man called Jesus. Why? Because they know who He is — they know who sent Him.

3.2 Moreover, perhaps the centurion, just like the apostle Peter, recognized that he had failed as a human being.³ Through his statement — "I am not worthy" — it is as though he were saying, *"Depart from me, Jesus, for I am a sinner; I am not worthy for You to have anything to do with me."* There's also a third possibility: according to Pharisaic teaching, Jews were instructed not to associate with Gentiles — "Do not dine with them, do not shake their hands, do not drink from their cups, do not enter their houses!" The centurion, aware of this, did not want to put Jesus in an uncomfortable situation in which, by entering a Gentile's house, He would be considered ceremonially unclean and would have to perform purification rituals. I believe that in the case of the centurion, all three are present: repentance, understanding of who Jesus is, and respect for Jewish law. He felt unworthy because he knew that the promise of the Messiah's coming was given first to the Jewish people. And if what I'm suggesting is true, what humility this reveals, my friends! Think about it — this was a centurion, not a common man. He already served a king; he understood how kingdoms function. Yet he was willing to set aside both his rank and the king he served — just for the chance, the possibility, of becoming an heir of the Kingdom of God that the Messiah would establish.

— In other words, the centurion was ready to love God's firstborn people, and he proved it by his fruits — he built them a synagogue. That is grace; that comes from God, not from the centurion. —

3.3 On the other hand, we see that Jesus cared nothing for the rules of tradition — He was willing to enter the centurion's house. Why? Because He knew the Old Testament, and He knew that the moral law of Moses called upon the Jewish people to reflect God's holiness, mercy, goodness, and righteousness toward every human being — not only toward a fellow Jew, that is, a kinsman in the promise.

ISOLATION DIMINISHES THE POSSIBILITY OF MEETING A NEW BROTHER IN FAITH

4 The question arises: if a Jew in his life followed the tradition of the Pharisees, how could he at the same time fulfill God's moral commandments? How can a Jew, who under no circumstances wishes to be found in the same room with a Gentile, testify to the righteousness of God? I believe he cannot. If you strive at all costs to avoid a Gentile, your focus is on serving tradition — and in doing so, you have made it impossible for yourself to even come into a situation where you could demonstrate God's vision of righteousness. My dear brother in Christ once said it beautifully: *"Every religion carries the letter of the law in its teaching but removes the moral side of the law from its teaching. That is why every denomination in history, in one way or another, has isolated itself from the world and ceased to promote God's righteousness."*

³ Luke 5:8

4.1 I agree with my brother. That is exactly what the Pharisees did — by their rules they separated the people from other nations: “Do not eat, drink, or enter the homes of Gentiles, or you will become unclean.” Jesus grew up hearing this kind of teaching in the synagogues, but He knew that God’s moral law always outweighs man’s religious regulations. From what He heard from the mouth of the centurion, Jesus recognized the kind of man He was dealing with. He understood that in that very moment, as He was carrying out His ministry, what He had preached in the Sermon on the Mount was being fulfilled. Therefore, He was willing to become “unclean” in the eyes of tradition.

4.2 The moral goodness that the Gentile centurion showed toward his servant — and toward the people of Jesus — stirred joy within Jesus, I believe. He knew that He was on His way to meet a potentially chosen child of God. In other words, the moral commandments of Moses required every Jew to show mercy to whomever he could, regardless of whether that person was a friend or an enemy. In this case, I believe that the centurion was a future friend of Jesus Christ — a future brother in the kingdom of God.

JESUS MARVELS AT THE CENTURION’S THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

5 The following words that the centurion spoke to Jesus struck Jesus to the core of His being. The centurion said, *“For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to one, ‘Go!’ — and he goes; to another, ‘Come!’ — and he comes.”* After he said this, we read that Jesus was amazed by what He heard. I believe Jesus was astonished by the centurion’s theological insight and understanding. Why do I believe this? Because the centurion understood how the relationship between Jesus and God the Father worked — he realized that Jesus did not have to be physically present for his servant to be healed. When the centurion used military language, he was drawing a parallel between his own position of authority and subordination and the relationship between Jesus and His Father. Just as the centurion’s superior gives commands that he and his men carry out, so Jesus receives commands from His Father and fulfills them on earth.

5.2. The centurion was essentially saying to Jesus: *“I know from whom you receive your orders. I know in whose name you carry out everything you do. I know that you are the long-promised Messiah who will establish the kingdom of God on earth. Your superior — God the Father, Yahweh — through the miracles you perform, confirms to the world that you have authority from the very King of heaven, the Supreme Ruler of all creation. When you command a miracle to happen, God the Father — who created the laws of reality — uses those very laws to bring about something supernatural before our eyes, thus affirming your authority. In other words, you, Jesus, as the Messiah, command those laws — because your King, Yahweh, has given you the authority to do so. Just as I serve an earthly ruler and carry out his will in his name, so you, who serve your Father, carry out His will in His name.”*

5.3. Luke 7:9–10. Jesus was astonished by the centurion’s understanding, just as in Matthew 16:13–17 with Peter — when Jesus asked them, *“But who do you say that I am?”* Peter answered, *“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!”* And because of that confession, Jesus said to him, *“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.”* In the same way here, Jesus knew that the centurion’s declaration came through revelation from the heavenly Father, not from human wisdom — not from “flesh and blood.”

5.4 And when Jesus turned to His people and said, *“I have not found such great faith even in Israel,”* He was essentially saying: “Blessed are you, centurion, for the knowledge you have spoken does not come from yourself — it was revealed to you by My heavenly Father; you are blessed, for now it is clear to Me that My Father has chosen you for Himself!”

5.5 And the truth of what I am proposing here is confirmed in the more detailed account of the same event in Matthew 8:10–12. Astonished by the centurion’s words, Jesus told His people that when the Messiah establishes His kingdom, those blessed by the Lord will sit at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In this case, Jesus declares that this Gentile centurion will one day sit at that table of blessing together with Jesus, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And then He continues: *“But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”* — in other words: *“You who think that your ‘passport’ (being Abraham’s descendants) is enough to enter the kingdom of God — you who believe that your heritage and the teachings of the Pharisees guarantee you entrance — sadly, you will end up in darkness.”*

5.6 Furthermore, Jesus told the centurion that it would be done just as he had believed; Jesus healed the centurion’s servant — thus proving, both to the centurion and to His people, that the centurion’s faith, unlike theirs, was a blessing that came from the Father.

THE PASSPORT

6 As we move slowly toward the end, I want to say this: it is grace; it does not come from us. God can choose whomever He wills, whenever He wills, and wherever He wills. And we, if we are like Jesus — unburdened by the rules of human tradition — can rejoice in those surprising moments when God blesses us through the testimonies of people He has chosen. Therefore, I urge you: do not be stingy in heart; make room, overcome the isolation of your denomination, be open to the unexpected — I believe God will bless you; I know He has blessed me, just as He blessed His Son, Jesus Christ!

6.1 Likewise, just as the centurion respected Jewish tradition, so we, too, ought to respect the traditions within which we have been taught by our church communities. We are different: some deeply love and follow their church’s traditions, while others do not care for them; either way, let us value and honor one another’s ways. But when a moment comes when we must choose between church tradition and doing good to another human being, then we must put aside tradition and do what is right in the eyes of our God.

6.2 That said, Jesus was not amazed by the centurion’s faith merely because of his intellectual understanding of who God is and what Jesus’ role was in God’s plan. I believe Jesus was astonished by the entire approach the centurion took in the situation he faced. He loved his servant, he humbled himself, and he asked his enemies — the Jews — to help him. The manner in which he approached Jesus was noble, kind, and wise. All of this showed Jesus that before Him stood a man who brings forth good fruit from the treasury of a good heart. And finally, the centurion “sealed it” with his theological insight — he convinced Jesus that he was a man blessed by God.

6.3. Furthermore, consider this: Jesus did not demand that the centurion convert to Judaism or become a Jew who would solidify his faith through observing the ceremonial regulations of the Law of Moses. In Jesus’ eyes, the centurion was a man who had grasped the most important truth: “Only

by the grace of God do I understand, receive, and know why I was created; my heart and my fruits testify to me that I live in the embrace of God's grace — therefore I promote His righteousness, not my own; I do not want to promote mine, for it is human and unjust." And it was precisely this understanding of God's grace, combined with his faith that Jesus was who He claimed to be, and his deep acceptance of truth in his heart — all of this, I believe, qualified the centurion to sit with Jesus and Abraham at the table in the kingdom of God.

— In other words: the centurion could remain a Gentile — a centurion — and Jesus had no problem with that. —

6.4. In conclusion, we can say that this event again reveals the lens through which Jesus looks at a person: not through his religious affiliation, not through his national identity, not through his social status — He looks at the fruits of a person, the fruits that have grown out of the centurion's faith in the one true God.

6.5. Finally, let us not believe that our "passport" — our belonging to a particular church denomination — is the identification card that guarantees us entry into the kingdom of God. It will not! The "sons of the kingdom" — the Jews — believed the same, and Jesus told them that if they relied on that, they would end up in darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The example we must follow is that of people like the centurion — and such people exist both inside and outside the walls of the church. Let us be open to that truth, just as our Lord Jesus Christ was.