



### Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

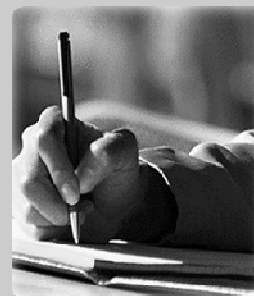


## HG38: The Miracles of Jesus (3/6) *The Faith of the Centurion*

**Luke 7:1-10**

### Home Group Study Notes

10<sup>th</sup> October 2010 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group  
with you, along with any previous notes and  
other resources that might be helpful.*



### Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

Share



### Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise, or listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers; etc.





## Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, Luke 7:1-10, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers with your Home Group.

**1:** Jesus was amazed by the faith of the Roman Centurion. What is the most amazing thing you have experienced/witnessed in your Christian life?

**2:** The Centurion was willing to love 'beyond the barriers' that were imposed by his society. How difficult is it for you to show the love of Jesus to the outcasts and marginalised in Billericay? What more could you, as an individual, and we are a church family, do to address this?

**3:** In his talk, Paul referred to the fact that the Centurion was a distinctively different kind of soldier and highlighted the words from the Infant Baptism service: *Fight valiantly as a disciple of Jesus against sin, the world and the devil and remain faithful to Jesus to the end of your life.* Discuss what you think this means for each one of us (who have been Baptised, of course!).

Faith, according to Hebrews 11:1 is ... *being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.* This man had a confidence that the Jews didn't even have and that faith was rewarded. This Gentile recognises that Jesus as the great physician and he was willing to place his faith in the power of Jesus as the Son of God. He approached him in a position of helplessness and in a spirit of humility and God answered his prayer. In vs10 we see that when his friends returned home, they found the servant well - it was a great miracle.

Whilst there is nothing in this passage to suggest the Centurion came to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour I think he did. As he watched his servant slave return to health, I think he responded: *God, is this Jesus your son? If he is, then I want him to save me not only from physical problems, but spiritual problems too. My spiritual problem is that I have no relationship with the living God.* I wonder, how many here today have that same problem of having no living, vibrant relationship with Jesus?

### Conclusion

The centurion had a faith that impressed and surprised Jesus. His faith loved beyond social, religious or ethnic barriers; he exercised a practical and active faith; he had a faith that put others first as he responded to the needs of those around him; he had a faith that was humble and without hypocrisy; he had a faith that had an extraordinary confidence in the power and authority of Jesus. This is the faith that amazed Jesus. I believe that this kind of faith should be part of our natural Christian life. We tend to think that faith has to be dramatic or miraculous or mystical. But that's not the case. Jesus was surprised by the character of a Roman Centurion who had an enthusiasm for synagogues! God values faith highly. He rewards those who have it. He rejects those who have none of it. He expects those who are His people to possess it and to increase in it.

The points I have highlighted today are not meant to be a 'How To' course on making miracles happen. There is no such thing. Faith is a gift of God and is not something we can generate ourselves, however, it is something we can recognise and develop. Few things are more needed in our individual lives, and in the life of the church, than a vital growing faith in the power and person of the Lord Jesus Christ that stands out above and beyond the ordinary. If we are going to grow in faith, we need good examples to challenge us. Jesus identified the Centurion as a man whose faith amazed Him. His faith serves both as a stimulus and as a model for Christians of all ages. We can learn a lot from his attitude and it deserves our attention, even our emulation. Let's ask God to give us that type of faith:

*Heavenly Father,  
Jesus spoke of a faith that can move mountains - if we could only possess such faith!  
Many of us, however, would do well to possess faith to move a few other things first.  
Like faith: to move us to reach out beyond the social or ethnic barriers that separate us from sharing Your precious word.  
Like faith: to get excited about Your work  
Like faith: to become active in Your work.  
Like faith: to move us to put the needs of others ahead of our own.  
Like faith: that is humble and without hypocrisy.  
Like faith: that has an extraordinary confidence in the power and authority of Jesus.  
Like faith: the adrenaline-pumping variety, that moves us to risk all we have on the precious promises recorded in your word.  
Heavenly Father, these are our mountains and they really need to be moved.  
By the empowering presence of your Holy Spirit, increase our faith!  
In the precious name of Jesus we pray.  
**Amen.***

The attitude of this Centurion to his slave was quite unusual – he wasn't a hypocrite, believing one thing and doing something completely the opposite. I have a poster in my study that one of my friends from Oak Hill gave me many years ago and it simply says this: You can talk the talk but can you walk the walk? (1 John 2:8). A world of difference isn't there?

A few years ago Paula and I went to a conference led by John Leach, the director of Anglican Renewal Ministries. He was talking about the difficulties facing Christians today and at one point suggested that there are only two things wrong with the church in general: 1) the clergy and, if you think that's funny; 2) the congregations! There are many people in our churches today that come to God on their own terms to receive what they believe they need without giving anything back in return. My prayer is that we won't ever be so blind as to forget that we are here to worship Him, not for Him to worship us. That we are to conform ourselves to Him, not the other way around. That we are here to serve Him and, as our faith grows, to learn to care for and serve others.

#### **He had a faith that was filled with humility**

The Centurion had a humble faith and Jesus marvelled because it was something above and beyond the typical faith displayed by those who often crowded around Him. They all believed Jesus could do miracles or they wouldn't have been there, but Jesus made a point of commending the faith of this Gentile and putting the Jews to shame. The elders came to Jesus and said, vs4-5, *This man deserves to have you ... (heal his servant) ... because he loves our nation and has built our Synagogue.* They thought the best way to approach Jesus was to show the Centurion's merit in terms of what he had done in their community - how wrong they were. It's interesting to compare the endorsement of the Jews with the Centurion's own self-assessment. He knew that his charitable deeds couldn't make him worthy to stand before Jesus. He didn't brag about all the good things he'd done, he confesses his sin and his unworthiness, vs6: *Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, vs7a, I do not even consider myself worthy to come to you.*

Humble faith recognises that God is holy, and we are not. Faith says: *I don't deserve to be in the God's presence. I have nothing to offer God but brokenness and sin. I have no prior claim on God. I have no right to His favour. There is nothing in me that He should help me. I am not worthy to have God come under my roof, and I am not worthy to come under His.* It takes a great humility to be undaunted by barriers to love. If I don't care what other people think of me and how they treat me, then I'm not restricted in loving people from another social stratum. If I'm really self-forgetting, the barriers disappear; I can stop worrying about whether I get proper credit, or who notices, or whether my needs are being met, I can be excited about what God is doing, because I am excited about him. Real humility allows that to happen, and it is real humility that can say: *Lord, I don't need to be pampered; I don't need to have any special attention; I don't need anything except your word.'*

#### **He had a faith that showed incredible confidence in Jesus**

And in Jesus' ability to heal! *You don't need to actually come to my house. Your authority over sickness is probably much like mine over my soldiers. I just command 'Go!' or 'Come!' and it's done. Just say the word where you are Jesus, and my servant will be healed.* The Centurion realises that a word from Jesus will be enough to heal his slave; Jesus doesn't need come to his house. He recognises Jesus' authority: vs7b: *Just say the word, and my servant will be healed.*

He knew that Jesus' words came with the authority of God and so he had great confidence the authority of Jesus words and in Jesus' ability to heal even if He wasn't actually present. No-one, up until this point in Jesus' ministry, had ever shown such confidence in healing from a distance.

**4:** The Centurion showed incredible confidence in Jesus' ability to perform a miracle. Do you share that same confidence? Why? Why not? Discuss your answer with your group.

**5:** Discuss the point Paul made when he said: *"Faith is a gift of God and is not something we can generate ourselves, however, it is something we can recognise and develop."*

**6:** Slowly read through the prayer on page 7, leaving a long silence after each sentence. As you pray this prayer, use the silence as an opportunity to be listening to what God might be saying to you as you pray.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## HG38: The Miracles of Jesus (3/6) *The Faith of the Centurion*

**Luke 7:1-10**

### **Home Group Sermon Notes**

10<sup>th</sup> October 2010 - Revd Paul A. Carr

#### **Introduction**

Jesus had returned to his hometown of Capernaum, vs1, which is located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Herod Antipas built a Roman Garrison there and it was considered to be a very significant port. Centurions were authorised to keep 'the peace of Rome' in this occupied territory – which certainly didn't make them popular! Most of them had a number of slaves who were responsible for carrying out administrative and household tasks within the garrison, and the city, on their behalf. One of these Centurions had a favourite slave, vs2: who was sick and about to die. Here is a man of power, authority, influence and wealth, surrounded by many Roman, Greek and Pagan gods, who realises that when it comes to the subject of life and death he can't do anything to save his slave from dying. But, remarkably, he's willing to place his faith in a Jew named Jesus. So he approaches Jesus, through the Jewish elders, asking Him to save the life of his slave.

I wonder, what does it take to amaze you? Whatever your answer, it's probably someone, or something, that stands out above and beyond the ordinary. Maybe it's Ed Milliband coming out on top of the Labour leadership election contest. Maybe it's being amazed that Bob Dylan ever came to be successful with the voice that he has. I actually quite like him simply because I can't sing! What amazes you!

Jesus was amazed, vs9, by this Centurion. It's an amazing thought isn't it? We know that Jesus experienced all what it meant to be human and whilst we can picture Him being joyful, loving, angry, and disappointed it's difficult to picture Jesus being amazed isn't it? Yet Jesus was amazed by this Centurion. A man: whose background and circumstances ought to have made it difficult for him to have faith. A man: whose occupation prized ferocity and violence. A self-reliant man: who took no favours from anyone. A man: whose background was paganism. A man: hated by the Jews. Yet, in spite of all the circumstances that went against him, Jesus identified this man as an example of faith, vs9 (Jesus said): *I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.* Jesus saw, in this Centurion, something that stood out above and beyond the ordinary. In 1 Samuel 16:7, we read that: *Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart.* In this talk, I want to think about five ways in which the Centurions example can help to bring the healing touch of Jesus into the lives of others.

#### **He had a faith that loved beyond barriers**

We know that Jesus came to save all people. He doesn't discriminate between Jew or Gentile, Black or White, Asian or African, American or European. Jesus came for all - including a Roman soldier stationed in Galilee and his slave. Jesus was a 'notorious' friend of sinners. He reached out to tax collectors and prostitutes and the untouchables and Jesus teaches us to put the needs of others before our own. He teaches us to seek out and help the outcasts and the marginalised and the forgotten among us and around us.

To our detriment, few of us succeed in doing this: it's just too far outside our comfort zone. I've seen many examples, over the years of supposedly, mature Christians refusing to get involved with people who they thought were spiritually or socially inferior to themselves. I often wonder where I would be today if the members of the chapel in the mining community where I was brought up had held themselves back from me when I first became a Christian. What, with my shoulder length hair and flower power hippy clothing etc. I didn't dress like them; groom like them; talk like them; I probably didn't even smell like them (though I was a great fan of 'Paco Rabanne' in those days!) and we certainly seemed to have little in common, yet they loved me beyond whatever barriers I/we perceived were in place. I've never forgotten their welcome, friendship and hospitality.

Somehow, this Centurion came to have faith in the God of the Jews. He recognised God had shaped their history, that He had spoken to them through their prophets and that this people, for all their disbelief, had something different about them - and he loved them for it. This faith caused him to risk prejudice, rejection, and hatred, to love through, and beyond, the social and cultural barriers that divided the society in which he lived. His desire was to build a bridge of understanding and he succeeded. The Centurion had faith that surprised Jesus because he loved beyond the barricades. He loved unconditionally - no wonder Jesus marvelled! It takes a great faith to love beyond the barriers and restrictions that society imposes. It takes special effort to learn to understand and love those who are different from us.

#### **He had a faith that got excited about God**

Isn't it amazing what we get excited about? Sport: Football; Rugby Union; Music ... We get excited about the peripheral of life yet never get quite so excited about our faith in Jesus. The Centurion shares a faith in the God of the Jews and it makes him excited! The Synagogue, in the first century, was the most important Jewish institution for spreading God's truth around the known world. It was a unique place where even Gentiles could come and listen to the Law/Torah being taught - they would sit at the back or listen outside the window to the word of God being taught. A Centurion attending the Synagogue would have been enough to surprise Jesus but he didn't stop there. He's so excited about his new found faith that he actually built a Synagogue, vs5. How strange that a Roman soldier in a foreign land should be so gracious and generous! And how equally strange that the Jews themselves should regard him so highly!

However, the crux in all of this is that the Centurions faith caused him to be a *distinctively different* kind of soldier. In the liturgy of our baptism services we say these words: *Fight valiantly as a disciple of Jesus against sin, the world and the devil and remain faithful to Jesus to the end of your life.* The Centurion had a faith that affected his everyday life. It affected how he went about his duty and impacted on the decisions he made. Even though: he was a soldier occupying a foreign land; hated by the Jewish people for being in their in the first place and all that he represented. He used his faith, and his position, to extend a hand of friendship to others and he did this because of his faith in the God of Israel. And this attitude, along with his love for others, was the evidence that led Jesus to consider the Centurion a man of faith.

#### **He had a faith that put the needs of others first**

The Centurion didn't come to Jesus for any personal gain. He came because, vs2: *his servant was sick and close to death.* He cared for and loved his servant, perhaps he even looked upon him more as a friend – it happens. Now that, in itself, isn't particularly remarkable. It's the social status of the servant that makes the Centurion's actions amazing. William Barclay writes of the status of slaves in Jesus' day: *In Roman Law a slave was defined as a living tool; he had no rights; a master could ill-treat him or even kill him if he chose. They were recommended to examine their farming tools every year and to throw out those which were old and broken and to do the same with his slaves. Normally when a slave was past his work he was thrown out to die.*