

Principles of Great Faith

Matthew 8:5 "Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him,

8:6 saying, Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.

8:7 And Jesus said to him, I will come and heal him.

8:8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.

8:9 For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, Go, and he goes; and to another, Come, and he comes; and to my servant, Do this, and he does it.

8:10 When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"

The story of the believing centurion is probably the best example of great faith in the New Testament. Jesus was so impressed with the centurion's faith, he remarked that he had not found such great faith in Israel — the entire Jewish nation. One might think that such faith should have emerged from one of the religious leaders of the day, such as the Scribes or Pharisees, most of whom had been students of the scriptures from their early youth. But this man was not even a Jew, but a gentile. To make matters more unique, he was a soldier in the Roman army, whose military occupation of Palestine was viewed with disdain by most Jews.

Ironic as it may seem, it isn't always the religious leaders, ministers, or theologians who aspire toward spiritual things. Often, it is the unsuspecting layman, the housewife, the farmer, the soldier or other humble, common people who demonstrate great faith in God. We must never lose sight that the Gospel is a simple message which has no respect of persons, nor requires any special credentials to believe it.

The legacy of the centurion is recorded without benefit of his name, but the title of his rank tells us that he was an officer with authority over 100 men. He was probably already a believer when he approached Jesus, seeing that he expressed such unusual comprehension of Christ's authority and identity (*Matt. 8:8-9*).

Note that at no time did the centurion actually ask Jesus to heal the servant. He came to the Lord with a somber report of his servant's suffering, but stopped short of making any request for healing. Apparently he was trying to assess the Lord's will in the matter, awaiting his response to the crisis at hand. Perhaps he was hesitant of how Jesus would respond to the request of a non-Jew, especially since he was a soldier in the unpopular Roman army. Or maybe he wondered whether Jesus would even consider taking the time to help a mere servant.

Without hesitation, Jesus voluntarily offered to the centurion, "*I will come and heal him*" (*Matt. 8:7*). There was no more question whether it was the Lord's will to heal the servant. Not only was Jesus willing, but by his own suggestion, was ready to go out of his way to the centurion's home to perform the healing. What encouragement this must have been, to sense Jesus' compassion, to witness His eagerness to bring relief and healing to a poor sick soul of low estate.

The centurion's humble, confident response to all this was most remarkable. In essence he said, "*Lord, I'm unworthy to have you as a guest in my home, but because I am a man with authority and am acquainted with giving orders to others, I understand your authority, and know that all you have to do is speak your word and my servant will be healed*" (*Matt. 8:5-10*).

From the account of the centurion, there are four important principles which we learn about great faith:

(1) Great faith begins as a follower of Christ, knowing him personally, realizing his divine authority.

It is obvious that the centurion came to Jesus with an unusual perception of Christ's position and authority. It is likely that he had been an observer and a follower of Jesus for some time. This indicates that the first step toward a faith which results in answered prayers, is to be a follower of Jesus Christ. We must have a proper relationship with Him, which enables us to approach God with the confidence that our heart is surrendered to the purpose of his will. Not only as our savior, but as Lord, our beloved master, whom we follow and serve with all our heart, endeavoring to keep his commandments and do those things which are pleasing to him. As the scripture says, "*Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight*" (*1 John 3:21-22*).

(2) The motives of great faith are pure, and are in harmony with the will of God.

The centurion boldly brought his need to Jesus to find out what his will was concerning the afflicted servant. He was not presumptuous or demanding, but reverent and submissive. As for his motive, his concern was not for himself, but over the suffering and need of someone else - in fact, a mere servant of whom were often considered the lowest class of people.

It is necessary that we ascertain the will of God in respect to our desires and requests. The scriptures clearly indicate that God answers those prayers which are in accordance to His will, not just our own. To have faith's assurance for the desired results of our prayers, our requests must be based upon the criteria of God's wants and desires. Prayer should not be viewed as merely a way to obtain our wishes, but a means that God uses to perpetrate His own desires. The Bible says, "*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have*

asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15).

God's will is revealed through the record of His Word to us, in the Bible. We can possess faith for anything promised to us in God's Word, and if we want God's provisions, it is necessary for us to bring our needs to Him. James said that we "*do not have because we do not ask*" (James 4:2). But he also warned that some prayers will go unanswered because of improper motives: "*You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures*" (James 4:3). Lust is a carnal, self-willed, evil desire of the flesh, and one of the major reasons for ineffectual prayer. Are most of our requests based upon our own selfish interests? Materialistic wants? Or, is our faith directed toward winning lost souls to Christ, praying for the sick and afflicted, or the needs of the poor and homeless? Our motives in relationship with God's will must be major considerations in our faith.

(3) Great faith has a humble heart, cognizant of the grace and compassion of God, whereby He loves and blesses us.

There was no doubt of the sincere humility of the centurion and his apparent high esteem and honor, placed in the person of Jesus. He confessed his unworthiness, his lowly undeserving status for Jesus to even come into his home.

The scripture states that "*God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble*" (James 4:6). The word "humble" means self-abasement. We are totally dependent upon God, His mercy and His strength. What God does for us, in response to our requests, is not because we have earned or deserve anything. What God does is because of His love and grace (unmerited favor) manifested through the redemption of Jesus Christ. He tells us that when we are in need to come unto the throne of His "grace" that we might find His help. The Bible says, "*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" (Heb. 4:16).

(4) Great faith has a complete trust in the dependability of God's Word, and accepts it as fact above any other evidence or circumstance.

The centurion was so thoroughly convinced of the authority of Christ's Word that He did not find it necessary for Jesus to personally visit the servant. He felt assured that if Christ would only just give the command, the healing would respond. He did not need to see anything or feel anything, but was willing to rest solely upon the premise of the spoken Word.

Such were the characteristics of Abraham's faith, who believed God's Word of promise, even though all natural circumstances were against him and there were no signs of the promise for 17 years. "*He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform*" (Rom. 4:20-21).

God's Word is the very basis of our faith. His Word is the source of all creation, and nothing can withstand its power or force. His Word is absolutely trustworthy, in fact more trustworthy than the things of this world, which we can see or perceive with our senses. The believer must surrender his total confidence to the Word, even without any shred of visible evidence, or even in spite of contrary evidence.

May God encourage you to follow these principles of great faith!

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