What Faith Looks Like

Luke 7:1-17

What is “faith”?

The famous atheist, Richard Dawkins, is known for saying:
“Faith is belief without evidence and reason.”

Martin Luther in 1522 said, *“Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it.”*

Andy May in 2025 said, *“Faith is DDT. Desperate, Dependent Trust.”*

How would you define faith?

The Bible gives us a working definition in Hebrews 11:1.
“Faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen.”

Hebrews 11 then goes on to give us a whole list of examples of people acting in faith. Because the best way to understand what the Bible means by faith is to see it in action. Rather than just having a dictionary definition, we need to see what faith looks like.

Today, in the passage you just heard, we are introduced to what Jesus himself calls: the greatest example of faith. And by the end of my talk I want you to know what faith is, what faith isn’t, and most importantly *why* you can have it.

All right. Where are we in the story?
If you are visiting, we’ve been going through the gospel of Luke and we’re up to chapter 7. Let’s do a quick recap.

From Luke 4 onwards, Jesus has been travelling around and spreading his message, both through words and actions. He teaches and backs up his teaching with miracles and healings.

We get to chapter 6, and Jesus gives the biggest speech recorded in the entire gospel of Luke - The Sermon on the Plain.

And now, chapter 7.
In contrast to chapter 6, the passage we are looking at today contains only one short line of teaching. The rest is Jesus displaying who he is. And in the story of the centurion, this passage shows us the answer to our question: What does faith look like?
Let’s dive in.
Chapter 7 begins with Jesus entering Capernaum.

Now Capernaum is where Jesus did a lot of his ministry. It’s a bustling fishing village. Over 1,000 people lived there. The Roman Empire had a military presence and stationed there was this Centurion. We never get his name, but we are told he is a man of status and character.

He’s also a man with a problem.

We read in v2 that he has a servant - a slave really, who is deathly ill. Now, by Roman law, he had the absolute right to kill a sick slave. But this centurion is different.

He cares about him. V2 says that this servant is “highly valued”. That phrase means “precious” and “honoured”.

And when the Centurion hears about Jesus, he sends the Jewish elders on his behalf to ask Jesus if he could come to his house to save his slave.

Now, Jews usually hated the Roman government, but listen to how these elders speak about this Centurion.

Verse 4, they plead earnestly with Jesus, saying
“He is worthy for you to grant this, because he loves our nation and has built us a synagogue.”

This was a good man. He used his authority and power to serve others. In the elders’ minds, if anyone deserved to receive a miracle, then this guy did. They tell Jesus, “He is worthy”.

But as Jesus is on his way to this Centurion’s house, for some reason, he has a change of heart. He sends some friends to intercept Jesus before he gets to his house, to pass on this message.

v6: *“Lord, don’t trouble yourself, since I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. That is why I didn’t even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.”*

We don’t have to meet, the centurion is saying. Only say the word and my servant will be healed.

Now v9 says that when Jesus hears this message, get this… he was amazed at the Centurion. You’ve got to grasp the significance of that.
This is the only time in the entire New Testament that it says Jesus was “amazed” in a positive way. The one other time is in Mark 6:6 when Jesus is amazed at the lack of faith in his hometown.
Jesus is like my wife Cat who’s seen a million of my magic tricks.
Not easily amazed. So when Jesus is amazed, pay attention.

Jesus turns to the crowd and uses this as an opportunity to teach. V9. *“I tell you, I have not found so great a faith even in Israel.”*
Do you get how incredible that is? The greatest example of faith in the entire nation of Israel, according to Jesus, is not even a Jew. Jesus is pointing to this guy’s faith and saying, “This is what I’m looking for! This is what faith looks like!”

So let’s spend a moment thinking about the centurion’s faith.
What makes it so great?

Well, there are three aspects of his message to Jesus that I want to draw your attention to.

NEED, WORTH and AUTHORITY
N.W.A. - “nwa”. Not a great acronym, I admit. But you’ll see these three in his message.

1. NEED:
Compared to others, the centurion is not a needy man. He is a man of power, influence and reputation. He is the Master of slaves and a commanding officer in one of the greatest and most powerful empires in the history of mankind. In the world’s eyes, he doesn’t need anything or anyone. But there is one thing that brings him to his knees. Death.

See, we can control so much in our life. And if you have wealth and power like the Centurion, you can control even more and you can avoid a lot of the suffering and the neediness that others face. But you can not avoid your own mortality.

We try to, though, don’t we?

You may not know this, but for the last nearly 20 years I have worked at Tobin Brothers Funerals. I work in the death industry. We deal with mortality every single day, but even there, in the funeral industry, people avoid thinking about their own death.

But in the end, we can’t avoid it. Like the centurion, you will - or you may right now - have a loved one who is sick and on their deathbed. And one day that bed will be yours. Whatever power or status we have accumulated will be stripped away and we will just be needy human beings.

Do you know your need?
Your need in the face of death. Your need for hope in this broken world.
Your deepest needs for forgiveness and reconciliation with God.
Do you avoid thinking about it? Or think you’ve got it all together?
Or do you, like the centurion, call on Jesus as the one who can meet your deepest need.
Because that’s what faith looks like.

But it’s more than just being needy. Which brings me to point 2.

2. WORTH:
See, it’s not like the centurion just had a need, and is ordering Jesus as a Jew to fix it.
No, his request is marked by surprising humility.

His message starts with *“Lord, don’t trouble yourself, since I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.”*
Now some think, maybe he understood that Jesus being a Jew meant that he couldn’t enter into a Gentile’s home without becoming unclean. And he was just being culturally sensitive.
But in v7 he also says *“I didn’t even consider myself worthy to come to you.”*
He’s saying, I am not worthy to be in *your* presence.

And the Centurion’s sense of unworthiness was not due to low self-esteem. He wasn’t wallowing in self-loathing, telling everyone to stay away!

When the Centurion says *"I didn't even consider myself **worthy**"* it's in the same sense that John the Baptist uses that word in Luke 3:16 when he says *"One who is more powerful than I am is coming. I am not **worthy** to untie the strap of his sandals."* Both John the Baptist and the Centurion understood they were unworthy, not because they thought so lowly of themselves. But because they thought so highly of Jesus. See, the Centurion saw Jesus for who he truly is.

You know, there's only two centurions mentioned in all the gospels.
This guy and the centurion standing at the foot of the cross, who you also find in Luke's gospel. Luke 23:47, "When the centurion saw what happened, he began to glorify God, saying, 'This man really was righteous!'" Centurions, hey! They see who Jesus is. They see his worth.

This is what faith looks like. Seeing who Jesus truly is.

So think about when you pray. Do you know Jesus' worth?
Or, do you expect Jesus will answer your prayers because you are so worthy of him paying you back for all the good deeds you have done?

That may sound crazy, but I have talked to people who are angry at God because God didn't heal them or provide them with a partner, despite all they've supposedly done for Him. At moments in my life, I've even felt like that.

In those moments, I should remember the great faith of the centurion. His posture of humility. His focus on Jesus' worth and one more aspect:

3. AUTHORITY:
After hearing the centurion's words, Jesus says in v9 "I have not found so great a faith even in Israel." Well, what sort of faith has Jesus found in Israel?
Back in chapter 6, Luke describes the huge crowd who came to hear him preach.
"The whole crowd was trying to touch him, because power was coming out from him and healing them all."

Jesus was like a magic rock star and the whole crowd was trying to touch him.
Now, it's understandable. Jesus was known for doing miracles and healing people.
And out of compassion, he often touched them when he healed them.

You know, when I became a Christian in my late teens (this is back in 1994), I went along to a few Pentecostal events. Big rallies where there was some visiting celebrity preacher who laid his hands on people so they could receive a blessing from God. Anyone been to those sort of events?

Sometimes God's power is treated like a force that can be harnessed and passed on to you if only you touched the preacher.
That idea draws crowds.

It was the same in Jesus' day.
Everyone wanted to touch him, and that does demonstrate some level of faith in Jesus.

But the centurion's faith was even greater. His faith was not just in the power that might come out of Jesus. His faith was in the authority of Jesus himself.

Listen to the centurion's words in vs7-8:
"Say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under my command. 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."

Now "centurions" had that name, because they had around 100 Romans soldiers under them. And they also had Senior Officers above them. They understood authority and how you exercised that authority with your orders. "Go" "Come" "Do this".

Well, when the centurion looked at Jesus, he didn't see just an average Jew who lived under the boot of the Roman Empire. He saw a man who outranked the Emperor of Rome himself. And he says it in v6. In his message to Jesus, he addresses Jesus as "Lord". This centurion might be a master over his servant, but he knew that Jesus was his true master.

And more than that, Jesus is death's master.

The centurion says "I can say to my servant 'Do this' and he does it".
But he can't say that to death.
Only Jesus can.
Jesus can say to death itself, "Do this" and death will submit.

And that's why he didn't need Jesus to come to his house. Jesus doesn't need to do anything other than say the word.

And praise God it is that way.
Think about it for a second.
We are like the centurion. We haven't met Jesus face to face.
But thank God that we don't have to go to some holy place or temple or stadium, and we don't have to touch some holy person in order for Jesus to bless us.

Like the centurion,
We can put our trust in his Lordship and authority. In his promises. In his word.

This is what faith looks like.

Turning to Jesus as the one who can meet our need.
Knowing that Jesus is worthy.
And trusting Jesus as Lord.
NEED, WORTH, AUTHORITY.
NWA.

And, for the centurion, it's a happy ending!

V10 says the friends go home and find the servant is healed.

It's a great story, but it's a dangerous story.

Whenever you read a story of a great person having great faith and Jesus providing a great miracle, we understandably ask some questions.
Is this a promise?
Will God heal me or my loved one if only I live a good life and have a good reputation and have enough faith?

And that is why you should never read any part of the Bible in isolation.
That is why God in his sovereignty and the authors of the gospels deliberately put stories next to each other.

And that's what we have here, with this next little story of the Widow of Nain.

v11 it says very casually, "Afterward he was on his way to a town called Nain."
Now, if you didn't know where Nain was, you'd presume it was just outside of Capernaum.

No. Nain is like, an 11-hour walk from Capernaum! It's like if we left Bundy and went for a walk all the way to Belgrave Heights Convention Centre.

And it's tiny. Population maybe 100 people. It's a poor, rural town and this is the only mention of it in the entire Bible.

And after healing the centurion's servant, this is next place that Luke tells us Jesus goes.

From v12. He comes to the gates of the town and meets a funeral procession led by a widow. And she's burying the one person who could protect and provide for her, after her husband died. She was burying her only son. This is a picture of desperation. Of destitution.

And v13 says "When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said, 'Don't weep.' Then he came up and touched the open coffin, and the pallbearers stopped. And he said, 'Young man, I tell you, get up!' The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother."

Another miracle. Another meeting of someone's need. Another rescuing from death through just the power and authority of Jesus' word.

But why does Luke include this story?
Well, I think the story of the widow of Nain complements the story of the centurion in a few ways.

See, if you read the story of the centurion and you thought:
"Jesus responded to him because he was a man of status and power and influence" then look at widow of Nain.
She had nothing, she was from nowhere, she was a nobody. Yet Jesus knew her suffering and Jesus sought her out.
So if you feel like you have nothing, and you feel unseen in your suffering, you can put your faith in Jesus. He sees you. And he seeks you.

Or maybe you think:
“Jesus responded to the centurion because he knew he was so unworthy that he kept his distance from Jesus and so he didn’t make Jesus unclean” If that’s what you think, then look at the widow of Nain.
Jesus had no fear to walk right up to her and to touch the open coffin.
God’s law in Numbers 19 says very clearly that if a Jew touched anything to do with a dead body it would make them unclean. Jesus is so great that he can touch the unclean and instead of becoming unclean himself, he makes the unclean clean.
So if you feel like your sin makes you so unclean that you have to keep your distance from God, know that Jesus came for sinners like you and me. Jesus died for sinners to bring us close to God.

Or lastly, maybe you read a story of the centurion’s faith, and you think,
“Jesus responded to him because he was a man of great faith. Unlike me.”
Maybe you’ve even heard other Christians tell you things like that.
I asked people on Facebook if anyone had ever told them that they would receive a miracle if they had enough faith. And sadly, the stories came flooding in.
People have been told that everything from migraines to miscarriages were caused due to their lack of faith. If you’ve been told that lie. If you think that God could not meet you where you are, in your spiritual weakness, or that he needs your prayers and great faith before he can respond, then look at the widow of Nain.

And what prompted Jesus to respond to her need?
It wasn’t her invitation. It wasn’t her great faith?

Verse 13 tells us. “When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her.”

It is the Lord’s compassion that drives him, not our faith.
That’s why he came into our world.
That’s why he died for us on the cross to bear our sin.
That’s why he offers us reconciliation and eternal life.
Not because of our faith or our goodness.
But like the widow of Nain, he saw us and had compassion on us.

His compassion is not inspired by our great faith.
Quite the opposite. Our faith is inspired by his great compassion.

The centurion had faith because he had heard about Jesus and he saw Jesus for who he really was.

And the people of Nain, once they saw Jesus perform this incredible act of compassion responded (in v16): “Then fear came over everyone, and they glorified God, saying, ‘A great prophet has risen among us,’ and ‘God has visited his people’”

They saw who Jesus was. A great prophet. But more than that. He is God visiting his people.

These two stories have very little direct teaching *from* Jesus.
But they still teach us and show us so much *about* Jesus.

We started by asking, “What is faith?” “What does it look like?”
God’s word doesn’t just give us a definition.
It doesn’t even just point us to examples like the centurion.
Ultimately, our eyes are always being drawn to the object of our faith.
To Jesus.

Let me finish by telling you a story.

Three years ago, almost exactly now, I was visiting my dad in hospital. He’d been battling cancer for a long time, and he was losing the battle. He shared with me his fear of death. Like the centurion, my dad knew his need. He knew his unworthiness. He knew Jesus’ authority. But he was afraid.

I remember holding his hand and getting out my phone and sharing with him Hebrews 2:14-15…
“Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death.”

As my dad faced and feared his own death, I didn’t point him to his faith as his hope. I tried to point him to Jesus.

He asked me to pray for his healing. And I did, and I think that’s a good thing to do. Luke chapter 7 is a testimony that Jesus can and does heal. It’s a testimony. But it’s not a promise that he always will heal.

And for my dad, more than healing I wanted him to have hope. To be free from the fear of death. To experience Jesus’ compassion. To see Jesus for who he is.

I want that for you too. So that you know him and with him face anything.
That’s what faith looks like.

In today’s passage, we read of a man of great faith.
And we should be like him.
But don’t miss the point of the story.
What matters is not the greatness of your faith.
What matters is the greatness of the one in whom you put your faith.

See Jesus for who he is.
He is the one you can put your faith in.

Let’s pray.