

The Centurion's Faith -J Wilbur

"And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, 'Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.' And Jesus saith unto him, 'I will come and heal him.'

"The centurion answered and said, 'Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, 'Go,' and he goeth; and to another, 'Come,' and he cometh; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he doeth it.'

"When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, 'Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

"And Jesus said unto the centurion, 'Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.' And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour." (Matthew 8:5-13).

Everyone has faith in something. Some have faith in their religion. Some have faith in the government. Many have faith in themselves; "just *believe* in yourself," is such a popular phrase. But, what exactly is faith? And what good is it?

For example, if a student only has the intellectual ability to get a "C" in school, will believing that he will get an "A" on his report card help him? He can believe in himself all he wants, but without the ability, he can never earn an "A." In fact, such a student may in the end be so discouraged for a faith that failed him that his grades may actually go down, not up. There are few things as disappointing as believing in something with all your heart only to find out that you were wrong.

What about religion? Many people refer to their religion as their "faith." They call it their "faith" because it is what they believe in to get them something. In short, most religious people have faith that their religion will earn them favor with God and get them into heaven when they die. But, is it possible that religion does not have the ability to do this? What a disappointment there would be if in the end those religious people were to find out that their religion had earned them a failing grade with God.

It is strange the way faith is often treated. People argue that, "as long as you have faith in something, it doesn't matter what that something is - as long as you are sincere." "If you are sincere," they will reason, "then it's true for you and God will honor you for it. You have your faith and I have mine." But, what if this kind of thinking is wrong? As sinners, we make mistakes all the time. Is it possible that this kind of reasoning is flawed? How can it be that two people who believe opposite things are both right? This is simply not possible, yet "people of faith" assert it regularly. What if truth is the important issue with God, not simply sincerity in some faith? What a disappointment there would be to find this out when it is too late to do anything about it.

The fact is that what is true has very little to do with what is believed. During the trial of O.J. Simpson, the country was divided: many believed that he was innocent and many believed that he was guilty. But, it was never any individual's belief which established the truth. O.J Simpson either committed the crimes or he didn't, regardless of what anyone believed. Truth does not depend on faith. It is faith that must depend on truth. Many trust that, "as long as you believe in something, you're O.K." But, faith can only be a good thing when that faith is based on the truth.

The centurion from the Bible story above is a wonderful example of this. He was a Roman military leader. When he spoke, people obeyed. He carried about with him all the authority of the Roman Empire. When he commanded a servant to do something, the servant would not dare disobey.

Yet, with all the centurion's power and authority, he could have no practical authority over his paralyzed servant. Here was a man at whom the centurion could yell commands all day long and nothing

was going to happen. The paralyzed servant wasn't going to lift a finger in obedience. He couldn't if he wanted to. This centurion's pride in his power and authority must have faded quickly when the reality of the matter set in. Despite all his faith in the authority of the Roman government and the authority delegated to him to command his servants, the great Roman empire could have no power at all in this matter, and all the faith in the world could never change that fact. He was helpless, and his servant was hopeless.

The Roman leaders would certainly have boasted of the great power and authority of their government, but in reality, the truth was that their power and authority was very, very limited. Religion is the same. Its leaders will boast of their "church's" power and authority. They claim that they have the inroad to God. They claim that their religious system is *the* way or *a* way to know God and to be with Him in Heaven. But, is it the truth? Sure, millions of people may have faith in that religion. The religion may be thousands of years old, but still, the question isn't whether or not you believe it or anyone else believes it; the question is whether or not the claims of the religion are true.

The centurion knew Who had the authority to cure his servant. Notice, he did not go to the religious leaders of the day and he did not go to the doctors. Presumably, through experience, he knew that their respective power and authority would be utterly useless in this matter.

Where then did he go? He sought out the only *Person* who *did* have the authority and power to solve his problem. He went to the Lord Jesus Christ: the only man who had proven Himself to be God; the only man who had proven Himself to have genuine compassion for people; and the only One who could help him. It is there with that Man that he knew he would find the solution to his problem. He knew the truth of the matter. He was not in control of the situation, as military leaders so often are, and he was utterly dependent.

The centurion demonstrated *faith* in the Lord Jesus! Clearly, he understood who Jesus was. The centurion knew that Jesus was God, the Almighty Creator of the universe. Jesus had proven it by performing miracles that only God could do: He changed water into wine; He raised up people from the dead; He healed the sick, the blind, the crippled; He cast out demons; He calmed storms on the sea; and He changed the lives of the most miserable of men. The centurion knew that no one was worthy to set one foot in front of Jesus, much less have Jesus enter under the meager roof of his house. This centurion knew he was dealing with holiness in the purest sense of the word: God incarnate; the Lord. The world itself could never contain a mansion grand enough, a palace majestic enough, or a cathedral magnificent enough to even *represent* the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ, much less *contain* that holiness. If only the religions of the world could understand what this centurion understood. He said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only..." Faith indeed! Recognizing who Jesus was, the centurion knew that He could do what no other person, government, or religion could ever do: heal his servant, even from a distance.

In today's climate of "relative truth," where it is decidedly unpopular to disagree with the faiths of others, it is easy to fall headlong into thinking that every religion must be right. This is a logical impossibility. If two religions say opposite things, they simply cannot both be true. They can both be wrong, but they cannot both be true. Truth is by definition absolute, and faith must be based on that absolute truth.

The Bible never teaches individuals to have faith in religion. It teaches individuals to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Every religion teaches men rites and rituals and methods of penance which are meant to earn the individual favor with God and bring about God's forgiveness of their sins. This contradicts the Bible which teaches unequivocally that it is not possible to earn favor or forgiveness with God by any kind of deeds. Religion is not based upon truth. Not even religions that call themselves "Christian" are based upon truth. God has made it clear in the Bible. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6).

Religion is a very palatable thing to man, for it supposes to put the power of eternity and the forgiveness of sins in his own hands (e.g. "say this prayer twenty-five times and you'll be forgiven," etc.). The question is not whether or not religion is agreeable or palatable. The question is whether or not it is truth. Faith not founded upon the truth will inevitably result in disaster, for it is not simply faith that saves the sinner's soul, but rather faith in Christ Jesus the Lord alone that saves the sinner's soul.

In this portrait of the faithful centurion seeking help for his servant, the lesson is clear. We are a helpless people, paralyzed and unable to obey the commands of God. We are sinful. As a result, like the centurion came to understand, we are utterly unworthy to entertain the company of God.

The centurion, however, found the solution. He found it not in his self-esteem, his morality, or religion. Rather, he found the solution in the only person able to solve the problem: the Lord Jesus Christ. We too must come to realize that there is only one solution to the problem of our own sinful paralysis: it is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: not simply belief that He existed, but also trust that He will do what He promised: “save to the uttermost” (Heb 7:25). This is faith based on truth.

God’s Word reveals the truth of God. God has substantiated the Bible as the truth in many ways, not the least of which are the hundreds of clear prophecies contained within it that have come true. Faith must be founded on the truth; it must be founded on the Word of God. Just as the Lord Jesus *spoke* the centurion’s servant back to health from a great distance *with a word*, it is the same today. Though physically the Lord Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven, and is thus a great distance away, it is His Word alone which heals the soul and the spirit eternally. Then, and only then, does the paralysis disappear, and the strength and ability to obey God begin.