

Faith of Soldiers

by Erlo Stegen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of total commitment to God, using the example of the Roman centurion who had great faith in Jesus and was willing to surrender to God's will.

Duration: 37:55

Scripture: Matthew 5:48, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 19:16-17, Matthew 27:54, Luke 23:47, John 6:1-14, Acts 10:34-35

Topics: "Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the centurion who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion and proclaimed him to be a righteous man. The centurion's statement implies that Jesus was indeed righteous, as only God is truly righteous. The speaker also mentions other instances in the New Testament where soldiers are mentioned, emphasizing the importance of righteousness and contentment with one's wages. The speaker contrasts the discipline and endurance of Roman soldiers with the sensitivity and lack of discipline in modern society. Ultimately, the speaker highlights the significance of the centurion's proclamation that Jesus was not only righteous but also the Son of God.

Transcript

Now, today I'd like to speak about a certain military officer that we read about in the New Testament. Quite often we read about soldiers in the New Testament. We'll start by reading Luke 23, verse 47.

So, when the centurion saw what happened, he glorified God, saying, and certainly this was a righteous man. Jesus had been hanging on the cross. From twelve to three, it had become dark upon the face of the earth.

After that, the Lord cried out, Saying, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And then the Lord cried out with a loud voice, and he died. Now, it happened after that, that this centurion, a Roman officer, at that time he was usually in charge of about a hundred soldiers with, say, in similar military terms, a major. So, here stood this centurion, this Roman officer, watching over all the proceedings.

And when he heard Jesus crying out in this manner, he responded by saying, Indeed, this was a righteous man. Matthew and Mark record that he went further to say, And this was the Son of God. Let's take the first text where it says that he said, Certainly this was a righteous man.

What did he imply by that? Remember the rich young man coming to Jesus? And he said, Righteous Master, what must I do to inherit the kingdom of God? Then Jesus replied by asking, Why do you call me righteous, Lord, when there is only one who is righteous? And that is God. What was Jesus implying by that? He was saying, in other words, Do you realize that I am God? In other words, no righteousness outside of God. So, he didn't hold back in writing.

When Matthew recorded the story, when he came, he said, Righteous Lord. And the Lord wanted him to realize he wasn't rebuking him, but he wanted him to understand who he was talking to. So, this centurion, this major, standing there at the crucifixion scene, he grasped this mystery, that Jesus was the righteous one, God himself.

You may know that there was an Egyptian historian of that era, and he recorded that event from Egypt, how it became dark between twelve and three, and he said, Something, some great event has happened. He said, It's one of two things. Firstly, the earth is being destroyed.

Or, the creator of the earth and the heavens is suffering. It is amazing that Gentiles, people of the nations who witnessed these things, they grasped the mystery, but the chosen ones didn't understand. Jesus said, They will come from the east and from the west and sit at the tables with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And the children of the kingdom will be cast out. You be careful, lest, in claiming to be a Christian, you are actually expelled from heaven, and it's those who come from elsewhere, from the east and the west, that are in heaven. Don't boast about your guaranteed place in heaven, whereas a pagan might be placed there.

And so that Egyptian historian was able to pinpoint exactly what was happening, hit the nail on the head when he said, The creator of heaven and earth is suffering. And here in Luke, it's recorded that this Roman major, the centurion, said, Indeed, this was a righteous man. In other words, he was accrediting him with divinity.

He was a pagan. He was from Rome. Commissioned by Caesar to go and keep the peace in Israel.

And so when the crucifixion of Jesus happened, this centurion was commissioned to go and oversee the event. Amazing that a soldier should say such a thing. The Roman soldiers were known historically for their steadfastness.

Military discipline was so rigid that the Roman soldiers if they were commissioned to do something, they would die doing it. Even if they were to stand guard duty next to a wall and the wall would collapse on them, they would die in the process. And so even if the soldiers were standing at attention, then they had to remain at attention even if a hornet or a bee would sting them on the nose.

Think of King Shaka's troops, how highly disciplined they were. If I was alone with the men, I'd tell you how disciplined he was regarding men and lust and how he would punish those who went astray regarding that. We now live though in an era where discipline is an unknown thing.

Self-control, especially in the area of lust, is an unknown thing. Think of King Shaka's troops, how highly disciplined they were. If I was alone with the men, I'd tell you how disciplined he was regarding men and lust and how he would punish those who went astray regarding that.

Think of King Shaka's troops, how highly disciplined they were. If I was alone with the men, I'd tell you how disciplined he was regarding men and lust and how he would punish those who went astray regarding that. Now, we are so sensitive, so ultra-sensitive, that the smallest thing hurts us and we are offended.

We've lost that sense of discipline. If we're hungry, it seems like the world has come to an end. If a mosquito bites us, we feel like everything has just collapsed on top of us.

We are so ultra-sensitive and see these Roman pagan soldiers who outdo soldiers of the cross. So here are these pagans who spoke of the Crucified One. This certainly was the Righteous One.

This certainly was the Son of God and the Creator is suffering. In Matthew 8 from verse 5, we get our first introduction to Roman officers. That was another type of centurion, another commission.

Or better said, this was a different centurion. He came to the Lord pleading with Him, saying, My servant lies paralyzed and suffers dreadful torments. Please come and heal him.

And the centurion answered, I'm not worthy that you should come under my roof. And the centurion said, speak just a word, for I am a man under authority. If I say to one of my servants, go, he goes.

Jesus marveled at his faith and pronounced that his faith was not found even in Israel. A pagan, heathen Roman soldier. And Jesus said, assuredly I say to you, I have not found such faith in the whole of Israel like I find in this Roman soldier.

There were other soldiers too. Cornelius. He was a very high ranking officer.

And Jesus said, I have not found such faith in the whole of Israel like I find in this Roman soldier. Remember Cornelius the centurion once said, I have not found such faith in the whole of Israel like I find in this Roman soldier. Remember Cornelius the centurion wanted him to come over to preach to them.

Peter didn't like the idea. He didn't want to go to that class of people and go to preach to them. And then God spoke to him and in a trance the Lord showed Peter in a great white sheet all different animals of unclean types too.

And the Lord said, take, eat. And Peter said, I can't eat. The Lord said, don't declare unsanctified what I have sanctified.

You see Peter was troubled by discrimination. He had an idea that a certain class or race of people were not wanted and not to be preached to. These animals symbolized all the nations, the Gentiles.

And the Lord said, Peter, don't call something unholy, which I have sanctified. So Peter had been standing upon his prejudice, his racial prejudice. And God said, don't discriminate.

Don't call unholy what I have made holy. And before God, any man that serves God is recognized by God for he is not a discriminator of persons. Cornelius was a major in the military and he received the Holy Spirit.

The Lord had given Peter the keys of spreading the gospel. It had happened at Pentecost that he stood up in the power of the Holy Spirit and 3000 were saved. Now the Lord was giving the keys to pagan nations.

It is astonishing that that Roman centurion Cornelius was known by the Lord as one who feared God. He together with his whole household. A very... He feared the Lord.

He and his whole household. A very rare occurrence. Usually you'd find if the father is a believer, well, the wife is on her own track.

Or the children are somewhere else spiritually. But you should... it should not be like that with your family. But rather that you and your whole household fear the Lord as with Cornelius and his household.

When we get to heaven, we will be amazed at who we find there. And we will be stunned to realize that those that we most expected to be there are not. The very person that you assumed would be a pillar in heaven won't be found.

There was another great officer. Remember Paul imprisoned? Julius the centurion had been commissioned to look after Paul on his way to a trial in Rome. And on the way, Julius the centurion protected Paul's life.

And also in reverse, there came a time later on where Paul protected the centurion. Now of course you find soldiers that were corrupted. Think of those who came to John the Baptist asking, what should we do to inherit the kingdom of God? What should we do to inherit the kingdom of God? Now of course you find soldiers that were corrupted.

Think of those who came to John the Baptist asking, what should we do to inherit the kingdom of God? What should we do to inherit the kingdom of God? John replied to the Pharisees what they ought to do. Then soldiers also came and he said to them, if they wanted to inherit the kingdom of God, not to remove unjustly the property of other people. And also to be satisfied with their wages.

What a rare thing. You don't find anybody today, even Christians who are satisfied with their wages. The thing is they don't have God's blessing upon what they receive.

You find that the Lord Jesus when he had just a few bread and fish, it was multiplied to feed thousands. You might receive 20,000 or whatever and it doesn't go far enough for you. If you believe, believe with all your heart.

Be perfect in the Lord. Quite often I've used the illustration of the Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti. When he was still young, his father said to him, don't forget to train your voice to become a good singer one day.

Having completed his schooling, he then did a teacher's qualification. And then he said to his father, dad, what should I do? Should I become a teacher or should I be a soloist? His father counseled him, son, don't sit in between two things. Choose one or the other.

Otherwise it's like trying to sit in between two seats. You'll just fall down and injure your behind. Don't ever try to sit on two chairs.

Don't try to sit on two chairs. You'll fall between them. His father had been a baker but was gifted with much wisdom.

The wisdom of Solomon. And you might find yourself being a fence sitter today. You're trying to sit on two seats at the same time.

It won't work. Your fall will be great. Maybe you sit piously in a service.

But at home you are immoral or you brew beer or whatever you're doing. The Bible says that Lucifer's fall was great, was sensational as he fell from heaven. And yours will be just as sensational if you try and sit between two.

You say that you're a Christian. You say that you're a Christian. But you have evil thoughts.

You sit in a service and you're more interested in chatting to your friend or passing notes around. You'll find that as others go forward spiritually, you'll remain a pauper. I don't imply by that.

I don't say by that that Pavarotti was therefore a Christian. I'm trying to show you the principle of success. He was totally devoted when he made the decision to go into singing.

Seven years of training before he got his first attempt at singing publicly. He relates how his training was very difficult. At times he felt discouraged.

Sometimes he wanted to give up. And it was five, six, seven years before he got his first attempt at singing. And then his trainer said to him, Pavarotti, you need another seven years of training before you can sing in metropolitan operas.

And he had to undergo seven more years of training. You're the type of person who perhaps just demands a position immediately. You get employment and one, two, three, you want to be the manager.

You see, the principle of commitment, total commitment, till he became the world's number one tenor. You'll find that Christians, they start today. A day or two later, they've fallen into things.

And others try to excuse it and soften the blow and say, well, they were tempted. They found it difficult. That's why they did that.

No, the Bible says that the children of the kingdom will be cast out. Moses said, choose ye today who you will serve. Is it Baal? Then serve him completely.

If it's God, then serve him completely. If you're going to follow Baal, then you can go for those frogs that need to come out of your mouth. Whom do you choose? What do you decide? Have you chosen the Lord? Between God and Baal? Between light and darkness? Whom do you choose? Let's stand to our feet.

Lord, we've heard of those Roman centurions who worked for Caesar. Lord, may such people arise in our midst. Those who would be like those soldiers of Rome.

And Julius. Who protected the life of Paul and defended him even from death. Lord, we've heard that we cannot sit on two seats and that we are forced to choose whom we should serve.

You or Baal? Heaven or the world? To be sanctified or just to be painted by the world? Lord, may it be evident that we have surrendered to you from the crown of our heads to the soles of our feet that we may be completely and practically seen as yours. Lord, grant that we wouldn't be a people who claim to be going to heaven, but we are not on the way. And then those who come from afar receive it.

Amen.

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