

(Radical Jesus) 27 Radical Faith

by Glenn Meldrum

Radical faith is a deep trust in God that acknowledges our neediness and dependence on Him, and it is only possible when we learn total dependence on Christ.

Duration: 24:26

Scripture: Matthew 5:17, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 8:5-13, Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 4:16-30, Luke 7:1-10

Topics: "Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the differences between the accounts of Matthew and Luke in the Bible. He emphasizes that these differences should not be seen as contradictions, but rather as a result of the different historical and cultural contexts in which the Gospel authors wrote. The speaker also highlights the importance of avoiding compromise and the dangers of following a superficial or 'pop' version of religion. He emphasizes the need for a spiritual revolution and a deep understanding of our own neediness in order to truly trust in God and experience His miracles in our lives.

Transcript

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Radical faith is a subject we will be studying again today. We began this section in our study last week in our continuing investigation into the Radical Jesus. I took a large portion of last week's podcast to make the point that God does not operate by faith as some claim.

God's mode of creating and performing miracles is through divine fiat or the divine creative command that is backed by His own legitimate limitless power to accomplish whatever He desires and commands. Faith is something God's rational creatures need, not God. We then examine the thought that since Jesus is God, when He walked this planet, He did not cease being God in any way, shape, or form.

As God, He operated through the power of divine fiat, as can be seen in all of His miracles. Yet, as I have spoken in past podcasts, Jesus never ceased to be God, even in His humanity. So, Jesus could live out a truly human life, He laid aside His right to operate in His divine rights as God, and so became totally dependent upon the Father.

His dependency upon the Father did not mean that the miracles Jesus performed happened through the Father's authority, because they were always done through the authority Jesus possessed as being God. What it does mean is that Jesus lived in total obedience to the Father, so that He only did what the Father willed. In our study last week, we then moved on to consider the people that Jesus prays for their great faith.

Time, though, allowed me only to dig into the life of one person that Jesus had had great faith, and that was the Canaanite woman that had a demon-possessed little girl. So, we will pick up where we left off last week to delve into the life of another person that Jesus prays for having great faith. I want to look at the faith of the Roman centurion.

The account is recorded in Matthew chapter 8, verses 5 through 13, and Luke chapter 7, verses 1 through 10. I want to read to you out of the Luke account. When Jesus had finished saying all this, in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum.

There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to Him, asking Him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with Him, This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation, has built our synagogue.

So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him, Lord, don't trouble yourself. I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.

That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me.

I tell this one, go, and he goes, and that one come, and he comes. I say to my servant, do this, and he does it. When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him and turned to the crowd following him and said, I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.

Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. Though I'm not going to read all of Matthew's account, when you put Matthew and Luke's accounts together, you get a full picture of the historical event. The differences between the two accounts may at first glance appear to have contradictions, but really there are not any contradictions.

The gospel authors did not record history in the way that we do today, so we have to be very careful that we do not force our modern approach to history upon those of another time and culture. Matthew and Luke were very careful historians. Their differences are the byproduct of looking at the account from different directions and having different priorities on what was important to pass on.

Matthew was an eyewitness of the gospel events, while Luke was a painstaking historian that compiled his account from many sources. Both men condensed the account due to the expense of writing material, the need in how to best make the work easily reproducible, and the style of recording history of that day. They each determined what was most important to report on concerning the event and wrote that portion down, while excluding those parts they deemed unimportant in communicating the gospel message.

So Matthew condensed the story by saying that the centurion went to Jesus, while Luke goes more in depth by saying that the centurion did not personally go, but sent others to be his representative. Such a response from a centurion is very reasonable for a man holding such a position, and as we will see, for the

brokenness that was gracing this man's life. So what I am going to do as we examine this event is to use both accounts interchangeably.

A centurion was a Roman military officer who had command of roughly a hundred men in a Roman legion. A Roman legion of soldiers had 60 centurions in it. The rank of a centurion is similar to that of a captain in modern times.

We find from our story that he had a certain amount of wealth because he built a synagogue in Capernaum where he must have been stationed. There are two possible reasons why he would build a synagogue. First, he may have been a convert to the Jewish faith.

Second, it would have been a good political move to help keep peace in the area. Either way, the people of Capernaum thought very highly of him. The story begins with a centurion having a dying servant that was very dear to him.

It only stands to reason that the centurion did everything within his ability to help his servant recover before going to Jesus. He may have tried both Roman and Jewish doctors, and if he was not a convert to Judaism, then he may have sought the Roman gods for help. One way or another, he had exhausted all human possibilities to see his servant recover from the paralysis that was causing him great suffering and would eventually cause his death.

We are told in Luke's narrative that the centurion had prior knowledge of Jesus and heard about some of the miracles that he had been performing. One of the major responsibilities of this centurion was to keep the peace in the area for the well-being of the Roman Empire. This meant that he would have regular updates on the major happenings in his area of jurisdiction.

Since Jesus was drawing very large crowds, it would have been important for the centurion to know the dynamics of these gatherings and if they were threatened anyway. Now we come to a very important point concerning the subject of great faith. When we look at the lives of the centurion and the Canaanite woman that we studied last week, we see that they shared certain character traits that are conducive to great faith, the most important being brokenness.

Brokenness is the place where we see our neediness, where we are broken of our self-trust and so become dependent upon God. Both the centurion and the Canaanite woman came to the disconcerting place where they saw that they were powerless to do anything for their loved one. Now it is one thing for the centurion to send for a doctor to heal his servant, but for him to seek the help of a Jewish prophet is another.

This alone speaks of the helplessness he was feeling over the illness of his beloved servant. It would have been a very humiliating thing for this Roman officer to ask help from Jesus, who would have been in that setting considered a Jewish prophet. Rome was the conqueror of Israel and the people of the land never forgot that they had been subjugated to a Gentile nation.

For a Roman to go to a Jewish prophet for help would have had the outward appearance of weakness on the part of the centurion. It would have also been very humiliating for the centurion to have to confess to his fellow officers and those he had command over that he sought the help of Jews in this personal matter. By coming to the end of any help that he could have received by way of Roman culture or known medical science, the proud centurion was learning the power of humility.

Through authentic humility, the centurion first sent some of the local leaders to Jesus and asked him to come to heal his servant. This meant that he had to first call the Jewish leaders to him and then share this great dilemma with them. He had to go one step further to ask those elders to be his ambassador to Jesus and ask that he would come to the centurion's home and heal his servant.

When the Jewish elders went to Jesus, we get a glimpse of the character of the centurion and how the people in the area thought of him. The elders told Jesus that this man deserves that he perform this miracle because the centurion loves the nation of Israel and built them a synagogue in that city. It is interesting to note the difference between the Jewish elders and the centurion.

The elders declared that the centurion was deserving because their religion had degraded into a works-based concept of salvation. The centurion, however, was not enslaved by their works-based religion and through the convicting power of the spirit, he had stated that he was not deserving. We know that the centurion did not deserve to have Jesus heal his servant because he was a sinner in need of mercy.

The mass of Israel had little or no faith and at the root of the problem was this issue of brokenness. When Jesus was not far from the house, the centurion sent some of his friends to tell Jesus that he was not worthy to have the prophet enter his home. So we see that the statement of the elders that the centurion deserves Jesus to heal his servant was not how the centurion viewed himself.

Through this we see the beauty of brokenness and the power it gives to faith. Faith is not about pride and the human ability to trust God so we get the credit for the miracle rather than Jesus. The audacity of genuine faith simply believes that what God said is true and that kind of faith is rooted in brokenness where we see our genuine need but are focused upon Jesus the miracle worker.

We then see that the centurion sent a message to Jesus through his friends which was an act of profound respect for Jesus. Lord don't trouble yourself for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not consider myself worthy to come to you but say the word and my servant will be healed for I myself and a man under authority with soldiers under me.

I tell this one go and he goes and that one come and he comes. I say to my servant do this and he does it. Before a word of faith can be spoken the character of brokenness must be revealed.

This is a powerful spiritual principle. I am not worthy stated the centurion that you should come under my roof or even consider myself worthy to come to you. This gentile had a greater knowledge of who Jesus was than all of Israel outside of his nearest disciples and even including many of his disciples.

The centurion knew that real power and spoke of high rank of position and since there had never been a man that did the miracles Jesus did his rank must be very high. It is at this point that the centurion is able to speak those words of faith but say the word and my servant will be healed. This is an awesome expression of great faith that must be backed by the life otherwise they are mere words.

We need to take a deeper look at why the man had great faith. First like I've already said he had come to the place of brokenness where he could see his neediness and then look to the only power that could help him. Very wisely the centurion applied his military understanding of authority to this situation.

As a soldier he had learned to submit to authority and how to unquestioningly obey orders. As a centurion he had learned how to use authority in a right way how to command soldiers and servants. He had come

to always expect unquestioning obedience when he gave a command and he trusted that those under his command would obey him whether in a wartime setting or that of policing a nation.

One of the things that militaries do in training their soldiers is to teach them unquestioning obedience so that when a command is given it is explicitly obeyed without complaint or grumbling. Throughout history there have been commanders that were dearly loved by the soldiery to such an extent that they would follow their leader into the fiercest battles and unquestioningly obey every command even to death. Everything the centurion learned about Jesus was that he had real authority and understanding authority is very important in the operation of faith.

Imagine that a Roman soldier tries to command a legion of soldiers but he does not have the rank or authority to do so. Any command he gave would be thoroughly ignored because he did not have the authority to command. However if the Roman general in command of that legion stands before them and gives an order they are now obligated to fully obey or else there are dire consequences.

The centurion takes this military thinking and applies it to his situation with Jesus stating for I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me. I tell this one go and he goes and that one come and he comes. Though the centurion probably did not understand who Jesus really was he did recognize the power that Jesus possessed and could fully believe that all Jesus had to do was speak a word and it would be done.

Jesus was operating in the power of divine fiat the divine command of absolute authority and the centurion recognized what the Jewish people did not. Now we need to understand the authority that the centurion had which is available to all believers. The centurion was not special but he did understand authority and as a result he walked in the authority that faith gives.

He understood that he was helpless to change the situation for his servant and he knew that Jesus possessed the authority to speak and it would be accomplished. So through the faith that the centurion possessed he came to possess the authority of faith. Imagine that there was another centurion that also needed a miracle and he too believed that Jesus had authority to do miracles but in this instance he did not believe that Jesus would intervene to help his need so he would not receive the desired answer.

We must do more than statically believe that Jesus does miracles we must believe that he will do miracles in and through us. There is an authority in faith that obtains the answer not because the person is great but because he or she believes in a similar way as did the centurion. It was not that the centurion had faith in faith as if he could make something happen through a positive mental attitude.

Unfortunately this erroneous teaching is propagated all the time and has nothing to do with true faith. Nor did he believe that there was some magical power in speaking out a positive confession as if saying the right words in the right way would force God to heal his servant. Here again this erroneous teaching is circulating around the visible church today and this is little more than superstition.

The centurion understood that Jesus had real authority and he believed that if he humbly and selflessly asked Jesus that Jesus would come to his rescue. The power of the centurion's faith was not in the words he spoke but the focus of that faith in the one who had absolute authority. This all has to do with the object of faith not faith in faith or faith in positive speaking or faith in magical sets of words correctly spoken but faith in Jesus.

When we compare the great faith of the Canaanite woman to that of the centurion we see some common points. They both saw their need and humbly came to Jesus asking for help. Many Christians fail to receive what they really need to live the victorious life because they are not much in prayer and the lack of prayer is always a true sign of lack of brokenness hence the absence of true faith.

Jesus told us in the sermon on the mount ask and it will be given to you seek and you will find knock and the door will be open to you for everyone who asks receives he who seeks finds and to him who knocks the door will be open which of you if he has a son ask for bread will give him a stone or if he asks for a fish will give him a snake if you then though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him what good is great faith if we do not want to ask seek and knock Jesus not teaching some cutesy idea here about receiving answered prayer but that which is persistent relentless prayer here's the problem about having great faith we must first have great need until there is a great need there cannot be

a great expression of faith to operate in such faith we must face such situations in our lives or in the lives of others that compel us to operate in great faith our desire to live a comfortable religion has caused us to resist total dependency upon god so we fight against his work in our lives to bring us to the place that produces such mountain moving faith in our microwave society we want a quick fix not the one that is going to bring us to the brink of ruin like the stories of the centurion and canaanite woman both of them acknowledge their personal helplessness which brought them to the place of total dependency upon christ faith is not an attitude of independence but of dependence upon god and this is what makes it so radical if we want to operate in great faith then we must learn

total dependence upon christ for there is no other way that it can happen we cannot exercise faith in god while trusting in our own abilities or the abilities of others or in the ways of the world self-sufficiency is not only faithless but is also rebellious and prideful all of which is totally contrary to faith and what it means to be a new testament christian both the centurion and the canaanite woman came to have a true to life understanding of their humanity and sinful condition they acknowledged in their own way that they were not good and that they were undeserving this is actually part of the foundation of great faith and until we understand this we will never desperately seek the savior or experience the miracles in and through our lives that he wants to perform it is only when we

grasp the truth of the depth of our neediness that we will ever really put our trust in god in both cases it was when they reached this point of brokenness that the lord could intervene to meet their need we can also see that when the centurion and canaanite woman focused on the correct object which was jesus then the miracle happened as long as we focus upon our problems or needs or to obtain some help from some other place we will never have the faith that will see miracles take place we must get our eyes off of ourselves off of the problem pain or obstacles and fix our eyes on jesus the author and perfecter of our faith faith must have an object and anything that takes our eyes off of the necessary object which is jesus is a destroyer of our faith we are told that when jesus heard the

centurion statement that he was astonished and said to those following him i tell you the truth i have not found anyone in israel with such faith christ's statement is both happy and sad here is the second gentile that jesus prays for having great faith and yet we have not seen one israelite praise for such faith the encouragement comes out of the fact that such faith is obtainable but is also a very sad statement that pointed to the low spiritual condition of the people of israel that none of them could be accredited with great faith at that time jesus is making an absolute statement here he is saying that this roman centurion

has more faith than the high priest the priesthood in general or the pharisees and the religious jews he even had greater faith than what the disciples and the

apostles had that followed jesus for all that time faith is not a jewish or gentile thing as if only gentiles could have great faith the problem with faith is that we can let our religion destroy it and that is what happened to israel both the centurion and canaanite woman were unschooled in the jewish religion they did not carry all the religious baggage that would feed the doubt rather than faith such great faith is rare not because we cannot have it but because we think it is too costly to live out now isn't that one of the biggest issues we face we do not want to pay the price to operate in the realm of great faith this is about total dependence and obedience upon christ and that is just too radical for most people because their dead religious views hinders them from living out a life

of great faith jesus is still looking for believers that will choose to operate with the same kind of radical faith that the centurion and canaanite possessed such faith is available to anyone that would desire to operate in that depth of faith but as jesus said in luke 18 8 when the son of man comes will he find faith on the earth it seems that our modern scientific culture that is filled with the lust of the flesh and the pride of life is also filled with unbelief and this is slowly creeping into the church and destroying the great faith that jesus wants us to operate in not only that but hell itself does not want followers of jesus to walk in the power of great faith because he knows that when they do this his kingdom will suffer greatly when jesus returns will he find faith on the

earth will he find it in you and me what a terrifying question but one we really need to answer we are in desperate need of men and women that will live out lives that can produce great faith let me be transparent here i'm absolutely weary of the pseudo-faith movement that is obsessed with money i read a month or so ago a list of the richest preachers and was appalled at what i saw all but one was of the hyper-faith movement and the fate they preached about is a selfish faith to be spent upon the lust of the flesh and the pride of life it is not a faith that looks like that of the centurion or canaanite woman all they have is a proud greedy religion that is not based upon biblical faith but upon begging and manipulation the love of pleasure and the love of wealth some of them have fleets

of exotic cars while others have multiple jets and others have multiple million dollar homes in various parts of the world what arrogance what greed what sin their lives are filled with everything that is the direct opposite of jesus their message feeds the fleshly desires of people who send them money hoping to obtain the wealth that the preachers themselves flaunt great faith is tied into who we are it comes out of our character in the case of the centurion and the canaanite woman they were unconverted pagans before coming to jesus and though neither story speaks of their conversion i strongly believe that they were the first gentiles brought into the new testament faith let me go back in time in our study on the radical jesus to the parable i gave of the deformed man which was really

an allegory about jesus the village people were a deformed hunchback race of people and their physical deformities correspond to our moral and spiritual deformities that define the human race the very sins that deform our character also corrupt our faith do you understand what i just said there sin spiritually and morally deforms us to such an extent that those deformities literally warp our faith so that it cannot be healthy or used properly who we are is of extreme importance when it comes to the operation of faith in our lives anything that corrupts our character will corrupt our faith anything that brings compromise into our lives will compromise our faith so if we want great faith then we must see the necessity of developing a christ-like character and a sound understanding of the

character and nature of god so many self-professing christians want to live in compromise and endeavor to use the word to justify their sins they then cry out in their need and wonder why god is not there it is a spiritual fact that there's a price to pay for compromise and it is like the flesh that the children of israel longed for in the wilderness and when they finally received what they lusted over it became death to them this is why we are in desperate need of a spiritual revolution because the pop religion of the day is killing the church until we are inwardly transformed our faith will be a perversion of what god designed it to be the tragic reality of our day is that what most people would consider as great faith god would see as anemic or deficient authentic faith only appears

radical because the majority of what we call faith is so subnormal that is not faith at all

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