Sunday School Commentary Lesson

By

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Renewed Health, Luke 7:1-10

Author Marshall Shelley, who suffered the deaths of two of his children, writes in Leadership: "Even as a child, I loved to read, and I quickly learned that I would most likely be confused during the opening chapters of a novel. New characters were introduced. Disparate, seemingly random events took place. Subplots were complicated and didn't seem to make any sense in relation to the main plot. But I learned to keep reading. Why? Because you know that the author, if he or she is good, will weave them all together by the end of the book. Eventually, each element will be meaningful. At times, such faith has to be a conscious choice. Even when I can't explain why a chromosomal abnormality develops in my son, which prevents him from living on earth more than two minutes.... Even when I can't fathom why our daughter has to endure two years of severe and profound retardation and continual seizures.... I choose to trust that before the book closes, the Author will make things clear."

In our passage this week, the centurion had the kind of determined faith that Shelley had. Shelley had faith that, even though he couldn't understand, he would by the end. The centurion had faith in the healing stories about Jesus; he didn't have to understand or even to see Jesus personally to have faith that Jesus could heal. Even Jesus was pleasantly surprised by the centurion's strong faith. Is our faith as strong as the centurion's? "It is impossible to please God without faith." (Hebrews 11:6)

Commentary Lesson

Luke tells of a Gentile centurion's response of faith in Jesus. Jesus' authority is likened to that of the centurion, and Jesus heals the centurion's slave. The emphasis given to the power of Jesus' word forms a fitting transition from the sermon on the discipleship in the previous chapter. The central character is this story is a Roman centurion; and he was no ordinary man. A centurion would be equivalent to a sergeant-major; and the centurions were the backbone of the Roman army. Whenever they are spoken of in the New Testament it is always in a positive light - Luke 23: 47; Acts 10: 22, 26; 23: 17, 23, 24; 27: 43. The centurion must have been a man among men who was used to giving orders. A man of authority and honor. Under Roman law a slave was defined as a tool. But this centurion loved his slave and was willing to go to any lengths for his well being. This Roman centurion appears unusual in his compassion towards his slave, as well as, the fact that he was clearly a very religious man. The
Romans viewed religion as an opiate for society, to keep people in their proper place. So often those in the army would only do what they had been given orders to do, "a yes man." But this soldier is "his own man", genuine, caring, and with a remarkable faith in Jesus' ability to heal. The Romans looked down upon the Jews and thought of them as a filthy race. The Romans didn't understand the Jewish practice of sacrificing animals to their God. There was a great deal of mistrust and misunderstanding between the Romans and the Jews. But it is crystal clear from the story that the centurion's heart wasn't at war with the Jews. In fact, a close bond of friendship must have been present between this centurion and his slave.

This centurion was a humble man who knew the strict Jewish law concerning entering the house of a gentile (Acts 10:28). He persuaded his Jewish friends to approach Jesus. The centurion was accustomed to giving orders, however he shows a striking humility in accepting the word of Jesus without him even having to be present.

This centurion was a man of faith. Jesus responds to what he hears about this Roman soldier, "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." (v. 9b-10)

Even though as readers of the Gospel we may never see Jesus or witness his mighty works for ourselves, where his word is present, there the power that was evident in his works also continues to be present. The Lord we worship is mighty in word, responsive to our needs, and compassionate to heal.

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