

¹When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ²There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. ³The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, “This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” ⁶So 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, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸For 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.”

⁹When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” ¹⁰Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

In Minnesota where I grew up, lakes freeze over during the winter. So one of the hobbies people have in winter is ice-fishing: You drill a hole in the ice and drop a line through it. In the middle of winter, the ice gets thick enough that you can drive your vehicle out on it to get to your favorite fishing hole. It sounds scary at first, but ice that’s two feet thick is as safe to drive on as concrete; your car’s not falling through.

But towards the end of winter, the ice starts thinning. And it happens almost every winter that someone will drive their vehicle out on the thinning ice thinking they’ll be okay...only to have the ice break under them and their vehicle sink into the depths of the lake.

You can trust two-foot ice with the weight of your vehicle. But three-inch ice? You can trust it all you want, but it just won’t support the weight of your vehicle.

Trust is only as good as what you’re trusting in. Or you could put it this way: Faith is only as good as its object. You can have all the faith in the world three-inch ice will support your car, but you’ll still end up on the bottom of the lake. Even more seriously, in the spiritual realm: You can have all the faith in the world that Allah or Buddha or Vishna will save you, but since those gods aren’t even real, you will most certainly be disappointed. Faith is only as good as its object – what faith trusts in.

I mention it because, in our lesson today, Jesus does something he only did twice in his ministry: He was so amazed by someone’s faith that he called it “great.” So, what did he mean? What makes faith “great?” Well, if faith is only as good as its object, then great faith has to have a great object. Since even life-long Christians are prone to start putting their trust in things that just aren’t trustworthy, Jesus reminds us this morning, “Great Faith Trusts in a Great Savior.” 1) His undeserved love, 1) his unlimited power.

So...first things first. Do you know what a centurion is? A Roman soldier – but not just any soldier. A centurion was a field commander in charge of 100, sometimes a few hundred, men. One author at the time said this was the most important rank in the Roman army. Sure, the general gives the order...but it's only carried out if the centurion, the boots on the ground, makes sure the "regulars" follow it. So they didn't just pick anyone for the post. They picked combat veterans with exceptional skills; people who were respected by their men, and had letters of recommendation from their higher-ups. This guy's well-respected, well-connected, powerful. He's wealthy – paid double the men under him.

But in his current situation, none of that did him any good. Luke says he had a servant – one as precious to him as a member of his own family – who was sick. This guy was on death's doorstep. All the wealth, power, and connections couldn't help.

I think there's an important lesson for us there. In times of trouble, where do we turn first for help? I think we'd all like to say, "Jesus." First sign of hardship, fall on our knees in prayer, he's the object of our trust. I think in reality, most often we turn first to ourselves and our own resources – because, functionally, that's really what we're trusting to get us out of the mess. But are those objects trustworthy? God sometimes puts us into situations just like this centurion's to remind us that they aren't.

But this centurion had heard of Jesus. About his teachings...miracles...believed he was more than just a Jewish rabbi, that Jesus could do something. So he sends the Jewish leaders to ask Jesus to come and heal him.

Did that surprise you? You see, usually Jews hated Romans – the enemy occupying force. And Romans hated Jews – trouble-makers for the empire. But this centurion, stationed in Israel, had come to believe in Israel's God. And so he loved the Jews – God's people – treated them well. He was so serious about his faith he had, entirely with his own money, built the Jews in Capernaum a new place of worship. So, when he says, "Go, ask Jesus to come and heal..." The Jewish leaders went.

Luke says, ⁴**When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."** Interesting, isn't it? This wasn't the message they were sent with: "Ask him to come heal my servant." Seems like the Jews felt they had to show Jesus how worthy this guy was of getting help. So, they roll out his resume. "Jesus, he's not like the other Romans. He's been so good to us. And to God! Look, he even built a synagogue. So he deserves to have you do this."

Question: What was the object of their faith? What were they trusting to get Jesus to help this guy? His resume, right? How good he had been.

I wonder if we don't do the same thing sometimes; come to Jesus for help clinging to our own resume, counting the synagogues we've built so to speak. When something difficult or painful enters into our life, we can start counting all the reasons we don't think we deserve it: "I'm in church on Sundays. I try hard to be a good person. Why me?" In our prayers asking Jesus for help, we might do the same – we might not say it, but we mentally count the reasons why Jesus should do what we ask. Maybe even bargain with him, promise to clean up our resume: "Jesus, I'll do better, just please..."

Friends, that's not what Jesus calls great faith. Because faith is only as good as its object. And when we put our trust in our own goodness or worthiness like that, we're clinging to a worthless object. None of the good we do earns us anything from God. In fact, the bible teaches us it's not really good – not in God's eyes. Because it's not perfect, so it's still stained with sin, and only earns us his condemnation.

Did you notice...how the centurion recognized that? Jesus isn't far from his house. And he sends word to Jesus again: **"Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you."** Nothing on his resume met

God's standard. So he wasn't worthy to have Jesus come under his roof...wasn't even worthy to talk to Jesus...much less deserving of his help.

But...did you notice? That didn't stop him from asking. Know why? Because he knew *Jesus'* resume. Luke says **he had heard of him**. He had heard how this man spent time with tax-collectors and prostitutes and sinners...people who were just as unworthy of his love as he was...but Jesus still loved them. He forgave them. He helped them. He trusted that Jesus would love him, too, and would not fail to help him, in spite of his unworthiness.

But you know this about Jesus too, don't you? In fact, you have even greater proof of it. You have Jesus' full resume. You know how when our first parents sinned, he loved them anyway and promised them a Savior. How even though he knew you would be born sinful, with nothing good or worthy about you, he loved you and came into this world to save you. How "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" under the punishment we deserved in order to win our forgiveness. How in spite of all the ways you failed him this past week, he's still here this morning assuring you of his love and forgiveness.

Great faith has a great object – the unfailing, undeserved love of our Savior. In time of need, trust that Jesus will give you just the help you need – not because of your goodness, but his.

But there's more to admire about this centurion's faith. **But say the word, and my servant will be healed.** ⁸ **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."**

He was a military man. And then like now army's success depended on people following orders. When he said the word, the soldiers under him obeyed – no questions asked. When his superiors said the word, he had to obey – no questions asked. Yet even his superiors didn't have the kind of authority that could heal diseases or save people from death.

So you see what he's saying? "Jesus, you're the ultimate authority. There's no one higher up than you – all creation stands at your beck and call. So this sickness has to obey you, no questions asked. All you have to do is say **the word, and my servant will be healed.**" He trusted Jesus' unlimited power.

That's something we can learn, too. I mean, we know Jesus is God, but sometimes our requests don't go up with this trust. We pray and wonder if it will really make a difference, will really do anything. We can think of all those times we've said, "Just say the word," and it seemed like Jesus didn't – and wonder whether bringing our problems to him does anything at all. Nothing feels different, nothing seems to change.

But is our experience a trustworthy object for our faith? No, God's Word alone is. Remember the words Jesus already has spoken, the promises he's given. After he rose, how he said to his disciples, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me." The words he spoke through Paul; his promise that he rules all things for the good of the church, for your eternal good. His promise that he answers all of your prayers – using his power to give you just the help you need, in just the right time, in just the right way. That he's able to do for you immeasurably more than you could ask...or even imagine!

Great faith has a great object...and there's none greater than your Savior. So, when trouble comes...don't look first to your own resources – look to the Savior whose resources are unlimited. Don't cling to your own worthless resume – cling to Christ's. His love for you knows no bounds. His power knows no limits. He will never fail to give you just the help you need, in just the right time, and in just the right way. He's the only object worthy of your heart's highest trust.

⁹ **When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel."** ¹⁰ **Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.**

Do you want a faith that Jesus' calls great? We all do. How do you get it? Not by thinking about how little or big you're your faith is...what makes great faith is the object. That's what made this centurion's great faith: Hearing about Jesus. So keep hearing about Jesus. How great a Savior you have. And God will grant you an ever greater trust in his love and his power. Amen.