

## **Amazing Faith, Amazing Grace!**

### **[Read Luke 7:1-10 NRSV]**

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup>A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. <sup>3</sup>When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. <sup>4</sup>When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, <sup>5</sup>for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." <sup>6</sup>And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; <sup>7</sup>therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. <sup>8</sup>For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." <sup>9</sup>When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." <sup>10</sup>When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

### **Opening Image**

Today we celebrate and honor our veterans who have given their lives to protect our freedoms. I want to tell you about one of these ordinary people who did some extraordinary and amazing things.

A baby boy named Alvin was born to a very devout Christian couple in a two room log cabin in 1887 near Pall Mall, Tennessee. He was the third of eleven children. The family was impoverished. They ate what they were able to raise on their meager farm. The father died in 1911 so Alvin helped his mother raise the younger siblings.

### **Church**

Alvin's mother was very religious and was a strong influence on Alvin. The family attended the Church of Christ on a regular basis and Alvin often

led the hymn singing. The Church of Christ came about during the American Civil War and was opposed to all forms of violence.

### **Register for the Draft**

On June 5, 1917 Alvin did what was required of all young American men, he registered for the draft. When asked if he objected to the war and on what grounds, Alvin said yes because "He did not want to fight." He later recalled, "I was worried clean through. I did not want to go and kill. I believed in my Bible."

Alvin was not granted a conscientious objector status so he was drafted into the US Army. He had his basic training under Captain Danforth, a man who was a very devout Christian. Captain Danforth convinced Alvin that the fight to liberate France from Germany was a just cause. Alvin went home for 10 day leave and prayed about his situation. Alvin returned to camp "convinced that God meant for him to fight and would keep him safe."

### **Amazing Feat**

Alvin served on the front lines in France and saw the horrors of war up close and personal. At the end of one engagement with the enemy, Alvin and his seven men marched 132 German prisoners back to the American lines. Upon returning to his unit, Alvin reported to his brigade commander, General Julian R. Lindsey, who remarked "Well Alvin, I hear you have captured the whole German army." Alvin replied "No sir. I got only 132."

## **Medal of Honor**

For his heroic actions Alvin was awarded the Medal of Honor. The Medal of Honor is the highest decoration given in the US military. His citation read, "After his platoon suffered heavy casualties and 3 other noncommissioned officers had become casualties, Alvin assumed command. Fearlessly leading seven men, he charged with great daring a machine gun nest which was pouring deadly and incessant fire upon his platoon. In this heroic feat the machine gun nest was taken, together with 4 officers and 128 men and several guns."

This ordinary man from a small town in Tennessee was the most decorated combat veteran of WW 1. His name was Sergeant Alvin C. York. York refused many offers to profit from his fame, including thousands of dollars offered for appearances, product endorsements, newspaper articles, and movie rights to his life story. Instead, he lent his name to various charitable and civic causes. A movie starring Gary Cooper was made in honor of him.

Sergeant York did things that were amazing. He amazed his superiors, he amazed the American public, and he even amazed the US Congress! But today I'm going to tell you about a sergeant who did something even more amazing. This guy actually amazed Jesus! Would you like to know what it is that amazes Jesus?

## **Narrative**

Jesus is rarely amazed. In fact, in all of Scripture there are only two times that Jesus is amazed. The first time is when he went back to his hometown of Nazareth. At first the people welcomed him with open arms. Jesus taught in the synagogue and they enjoyed his teaching. But then some of the people started to scoff. "Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son?" Somehow their appreciation turned to skepticism. And here's the first time Jesus was amazed. Mark says, "He was amazed at their lack of faith."

## **Roman Centurion**

The second time Jesus is amazed is in today's Scripture. This story about Jesus and the Roman Centurion happens during the Roman occupation of Israel. Who is this Roman centurion and why is Jesus so amazed?

This Roman Centurion is the enemy. He is in charge of 100 soldiers and is the equivalent of a sergeant in our US Army. He is part of an occupation force but he is different.

## **Worships God**

This Roman centurion has a well-earned reputation among the Jews. He has given money to build the local synagogue. He is probably a God-fearer in that he is a Gentile who worships the Hebrew God instead of the Roman gods.

**Respected**

He is well respected by the people of the town. They come to Jesus telling Jesus about the centurion and how he deserves to be helped. "When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, 'He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us'" (Luke 7:4-5).

**Humble**

The Roman Centurion is humble. He tells Jesus that he is not deserving of Jesus coming to his home. He does not use coercion to force Jesus to come to him. He simply sends a message to Jesus asking for help. "And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, 'Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed'" (Luke 7:6-7).

This centurion who commands the occupation army of the city does not place himself above Jesus. In fact he says that he does not deserve to have Jesus in his home.

**Considerate**

This Roman centurion is considerate and observes the Jewish customs and laws. He knows that a Jew would become unclean by coming in contact

with Gentiles or by simply entering a Gentile home. He does not ask Jesus to defile himself. He simply asks for a word of healing for his servant.

### **Compassionate**

This Roman centurion is a man of compassion because he is asking for help not for himself but for others. He is concerned about the welfare of a slave. A slave is the lowest person in the Roman world. A slave has no rights, no freedom, and no privileges yet this Roman Centurion seeks his healing.

### **Great Faith**

This Roman Centurion is also a man of great faith. The centurion has heard about Jesus and sends for help for him out of faith. His faith in God is so strong that he believes that the God of the Hebrews will help a Gentile. He does not turn to the numerous false Roman gods. He calls on the God of Israel. Even though he has never seen the God of Israel and has never met Jesus, he knows that God will heal his slave.

### **Authority**

The Centurion understands authority and obedience. He uses the analogy of the military and the hierarchy where people respond to orders. He sends a message to Jesus saying, "For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it" (Luke 7:7-8).

The Centurion has faith that Jesus has authority over everything on Earth. The Centurion has faith that Jesus can speak a word of healing and his servant will be healed. This is what amazes Jesus. Do we have the faith of this Centurion?

### **Summary**

The two times Jesus is amazed both have to do with faith. One was lack of faith; the other was great faith. Faith and lack of faith are not all that unusual; we see them all the time. But maybe what amazed Jesus is that the lack of faith came from his own people—God’s chosen people, descended from Abraham, who have a long history with God. And the great faith came from a Roman—an outsider—somebody who didn’t belong to God’s people. This is Good News for us!

### **Good News**

The Good News of this passage is that God is the God of all people. God hears and answers the prayers of all people. God is not just the God of the Jews. God is the God of all creation. What is our response to this Good News?

### **Our Response**

Our response to this Good News is to be humble, pray for others, and have great faith in God.

### **Be Humble**

The Roman Centurion was humble. Even though he is part of the mighty Roman Empire he addresses Jesus as his Lord. ***Show your great faith in Jesus by being humble and worshipping him.***

### **Pray for Others**

The Roman Centurion prayed to the one true God not for himself but for others. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray he gave them a prayer where they pray for others. ***Show your great faith in Jesus by praying for others.***

### **Have Faith**

Finally, this Roman Centurion believed and trusted Jesus. The disciples lived with Jesus for three years. They saw him, heard him, touched him, and followed him. The Roman centurion never met Jesus. He simply heard about Jesus from others and believed. ***Show your great faith by trusting in Jesus.***

**In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.**



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