For the last few weeks we took an in-depth look at the “sermon on the plain” where Jesus told us how to be blessed. Basically, the poor, hungry, broken, and hated for Jesus’ sake, who love others radically—even their enemies—will rejoice, laugh, be satisfied and rewarded greatly in heaven. They will have influence that will change the world, and their foundation is rock solid: Christ!

Finally, we begin Luke 7:  

1 After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 Now a centurion...

I want to tell you what a centurion is. He is an enlisted man who has worked himself up through the ranks to be in charge of 100 men. The pay was significant. Using today’s numbers, The ave. army private = $18200. By that standard, the common centurion made $364k (some made 2-4 times that)! To get this honor, one must be proven in combat or in martial arts, and have a record of obedience, and show leadership. These men were the backbone of the Rom army. They were serious, ambitious, professional soldiers. In occupied territories, centurions were often the military governors of a town or area. They were feared and often hated by those subjected to them. They were not known for having compassion. They wore a flashy helmet and a breastplate covered with silver medallions (war medals) for valor (picture). They were important, and they knew it. They usually had utter disdain for those conquered. But this one’s different.

3 When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.

Now we see that this important Roman officer had heard about this Jewish itinerate preacher/healer and believes Jesus is for real. He moves on behalf of his servant, not himself. The “elders” may have included patriarches from the town, the ruler of synagogue, and perhaps other important or wealthy men. All of this is quite unusual! But something else odd happened. 4 And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.” This is remarkable. They recognize this guy isn’t your average centurion. This guy actually lives out some of the things Jesus said his followers should do: Love enemies, be selfless, generous, about others. 5 And Jesus went with them. On the heels of his sermon, Jesus himself seems to be demonstrating radical love for enemies. So he agrees to go heal this gentile soldier. While walking across town, The centurion gets word that Jesus is actually coming. At this point you’d think he’d be thrilled, but he’s not...

When [Jesus] was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. 7 Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. 8 For I too 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 servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” Did you catch that? Wow. He called him Lord, he shows incredible understanding of his own sinfulness, and he totally gets Jesus’ authority and power. He never blinks about whether Jesus can do this. He
simply believes, and doesn’t think Jesus even needs to be present to make it happen. What was Jesus’ reaction? He is seriously impressed!

9When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him,
The word translated, “marveled” is only used three time regarding Jesus. Two of them is with this story (Matthew). The other is when Jesus marvels at the people in Nazareth’s LACK of faith [Mk. 6:6]. But here Jesus is impressed. And he makes a big deal of it: and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” 10And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

There’s a lot of good that can be said about this gentile centurion:
He loved his servant. He loved the Jews and demonstrated it. He shows humility (I am not worthy), and based only on what he’s heard, he has a correct understanding of Christ’s authority and identity. All that is good. But it’s his faith that Jesus focuses on as remarkable.

I want to talk to you about faith—the kind of faith Jesus desires: Here are 3 key aspects of faith that the Bible teaches:

Faith defined: Heb. 11:1 “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” That’s what we see in this centurion who never saw Jesus yet believed he had the power and authority to heal his servant in absentia. He simply believed! Faith=pistis, to believe=pisteuō

Faith is necessary for a relationship with God: Heb. 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”

Faith overrides all perceived barriers. This guy was a gentile. Jews would have said that he was beyond saving. But no one is beyond saving who has faith. Eph. Gal. 2:15We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. Of course grace is God’s gift. But I believe faith is too. Faith is the means by which God’s grace is applied. Grace through faith. No one is an outsider to Christ if he/she has faith.

“Wait” some are saying, “I just struggle with believing.” In Mark 9: There’s a dad who’s son is demon possessed. He is desperate for Jesus to heal him. “22 But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” 23And Jesus said to him, “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.” 24Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

I love that prayer! If you aren’t there yet regarding belief, ask God to help you! To give you faith to believe!
There’s one more key aspect of faith... **Faith works!** Real faith results in a change in lifestyle, and will show evidence.

What the Centurion shows is an example of faith in Christ's identity/authority/ability that results in good works. Faith in Christ brings forth actions of humility and love—like what we’ve been talking about the last few weeks. This kind of faith saves, and it also bears fruit.

James 2:14-19  

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

Gal. 2:20  

20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Luke is showing us that Jesus is giving the foundational blocks for “getting” God.

Last 6 weeks: **Agape Love** is that essential characteristic of God that caused him to make and save us. He wants to share it with us. It is how we are blessed. It is the key to living the Christ life. Love. Big huge foundational building block.

But the key to gaining Christ? **Faith**. As far as we are concerned, all that is required is faith. We see in the centurion that it is NOT about heritage. It is about faith. His faith is what caused Jesus to marvel. It is what Jesus wanted all the others to see.

Now, I’ve got a question: where are you? Have you believed?

For some it is a toggle light switch, for some it is a dimmer switch. Perhaps you’re just now getting to the place where you can say, “Yep, I think I believe.” Now, like this centurion, take a stand. communicate it.

Baptism is the most biblical way to express your faith! Next week...