

INTRODUCTION

Bob lived near a Baptist Church but he didn't attend. He loved his dog, an old golden retriever named Scout. One day Scout died, so Bob called the Baptist preacher to see if he would be willing to perform the funeral service for old Scout. The preacher said, "I don't really do things like that, but there's a new denomination church down the road, no telling what they believe. Why don't you ask them to bury your dog?" Bob said, "Thanks, preacher, I'll do that. By the way, do you think \$5,000 is enough to pay them for the service?" The preacher said, "For goodness sakes, Bob, why didn't you tell me Scout was a Baptist?"

During the height of the slave trade in the 17th century, slaves were thought of as sub-human creatures with no souls. They were considered to be just slightly above the level of dogs. Some of the worst violations of human rights were practiced during this dark chapter of history. One wicked slave trader, an Englishman named John Newton, bought and sold human life as a simple commodity. Later John Newton was gloriously converted to Christ. He was so astonished that the grace of God was able to save a wicked, vile slave trader he wrote these famous words, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found; was blind but now I see." I've often thought heaven's national anthem should be "Amazing Grace." When you think about it, the grace of God *is* truly amazing—from our perspective. But today, I want to introduce you to a song Jesus could have sung. "Amazing Faith how sweet the sight, that trusts my saving might!" God isn't amazed by grace; it's part of His character. We are amazed by grace. But Jesus *is* amazed by a certain kind of faith. We see this amazing faith illustrated in the life of a Roman centurion in Luke 7:1-10:

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 and 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, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. This 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 turning to the crowd following he 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.

Did you catch that? Jesus was *amazed* at the centurion's faith—amazing faith! That word "amazing" ("marvel" in KJV) is *thaumazo*, which literally means, "to stand in amazement and wonder." It is used in connection with Jesus only two times—both in reference to faith. In Mark 6:6 we read Jesus was amazed at the unbelief of the Jews in Nazareth. And here, we read He was amazed at the faith of the centurion.

One reason Jesus was amazed was because this was a Gentile—a Roman soldier! He was a centurion, which meant he was a soldier responsible for roughly 100 soldiers. Six centurions comprised a Roman cohort (600 men). Ten cohorts made a legion (6,000 men). Jesus understood these divisions because at His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane He indicated He could call down twelve legions of angels (72,000). Centurions were the backbone of the mighty Roman army. The historian Polybius wrote regarding centurions, “They must not be so much seekers after danger as men who can command, steady in action, and reliable; they ought not to be over anxious to rush into the fight; but when hard pressed they must be ready to hold their ground and die at their posts.” They were often older, hardened soldiers who had experienced much bloodshed and cruelty. How amazing, indeed, to discover the faith of this man! Let’s use him as an unlikely example to discover the kind of faith that amazes Jesus.

FAITH THAT AMAZES JESUS:

1. Approaches Him as the only source of help

The centurion had a need in his life and heard about Jesus. His first act was to send someone to enlist the Jesus’ assistance. His servant was not just sick; he was at the point of death. It was desperation time and in his desperation, he did the right thing—he sent for Jesus.

When you go to the store, you use money as an exchange for products. Faith is the only currency accepted by God. Faith is your greatest asset and unbelief is your greatest liability. God doesn’t accept logic, reason, or good works. Faith is not His preferred currency; it is the *only* currency accepted in heaven. Perhaps the most instructive verse in the Bible about faith is seen in Hebrews 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Your faith is only as good as the object of your faith. Faith alone is not good enough. Sometimes people say, “Just have faith, everything will turn out okay.” Wrong. Faith in faith is worthless. Your faith is only as good as the object of your faith. The centurion didn’t just have faith his servant would get better; he put his faith in Jesus. Weak faith in the right object is better than strong faith in the wrong thing.

You don’t have to understand everything about faith to employ it. You only have to know that without faith, you can never please God. It is faith that allows you to believe there is a God. It is faith that allows you believe God is good. In other words, He is not out to punish you or to play hide-‘n-seek with you. He wants to reward you when you seek Him.

Faith is simply our acceptance of the love and grace God offers

It is not our faith that causes God to act—He has already initiated a love relationship with us.

There was a movie a few years ago called *Field of Dreams* in which Kevin Costner played a farmer who builds a ball field. In one particular scene, Kevin was playing catch one afternoon with his “dad” who returned as a younger ballplayer. As I watched that simple scene, I found myself crying. It was because it reminded me so much of one of my most pleasant memories

with my dad—when we played catch. He bought me a Nellie Fox glove and oiled it down good to make it limber. He taught me how to put the glove on; showed me how to hold it up for high throws and low for grounders. Then he tossed the ball to me and I put my glove out to snag it. We kept count to see how many I could catch in a row. I still remember the joy in his heart when I caught my first ten in a row! At first the throws were slow grounders and easy pop flies thrown right to me. As I got older, the throws got harder and I sometimes had to run forward or back to catch the fly balls. One day our dog distracted me and I didn’t notice my dad had tossed the ball to me. When he yelled I looked up—just in time to have the baseball hit me squarely on my forehead: bam! I’ve always been pretty hard headed. The ball bounced off for a ground rule double! My problem was I didn’t hold the glove up to catch the ball. I learned a painful lesson that day. When my Father tosses a ball toward me, I ought to raise my glove and catch it. Later when I played real baseball I learned that when I got under a pop up I would shout, “I’ve got it! It’s mine!” Even before I caught the ball, I claimed I already had it. What a great lesson about faith!

God, in His great love has tossed grace, mercy, forgiveness and love toward us. Faith is simply our response to reach out and snag it. Then we toss it back as love and obedience and He tosses us back some more grace, love, and forgiveness. Faith is *not* catching God’s mercy once-for-all; it continues to be a part of our lives as we continue to catch His blessings and the older we get, sometimes the catches get harder and we have to run to claim God’s grace.

Okay, let’s do a little faith- profession right now. God has tossed plenty of grace, mercy, and love your way. I want you to hold up your glove right now and repeat after me. “I’ve got it!” “It’s mine!” “Good catch!” Faith is believing God exists and He is the source of your hope.

2. Focuses on the needs of others

The centurion didn’t selfishly ask Jesus to help him but to heal a servant whom he loved. How unusual! During the Roman occupation, many people owned slaves. In that time, most people regarded slaves the same way people treat their pets today—I retract that statement because I’ve seen the way some of you treat your pets. Slaves were treated much worse than we treat our pets! They were considered to be a subhuman species and were treated like property. If a slave died, it was regretted only because it was a valuable piece of “equipment” that was lost.

However, we see this centurion “loved” his slave enough to send for Jesus to heal him.

The very best kind of prayer is prayed for other people. Be careful you don’t become consumed with only praying for yourself. The prayer, “Bless me, bless me, bless me” may seem harmless, but the danger in it is it only focuses on your needs, not the needs of others.

As I study this passage I cannot ignore the fascinating doctrine of vicarious faith. Vicarious faith is when one person’s faith is used for the benefit of someone else. Did you notice it was the faith of the centurion on behalf of his afflicted slave that amazed Jesus? The slave ends up being completely healed and he never said one word to Jesus! This miracle would be easier to explain if the servant himself had come to Jesus and begged Him saying, “Jesus, please heal me!” And we are going to see plenty of examples where people did just that. However, in this case, it was

the faith of the centurion that caused Jesus to release His power. Does Jesus honor one person’s faith on behalf of another? I believe He does. Do you remember our story in Luke 5 where the four friends brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus and dug a hole in the roof to lower him in front of the Lord? It said, “When Jesus saw *their* faith, he said, ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven.’” (Luke 5:20) In both these cases, Jesus honored the faith of someone else on behalf of the benefit of someone they loved.

You may be sitting there scratching your head, asking, “Pastor, you mean if I have a friend or family who needs the power of God released in their life that God will honor my faith as I pray for them?” Based on these two clear examples I would say, “Absolutely.” You say, “But I don’t understand this idea of vicarious faith—it’s new to me.” Well, I don’t really understand how the Internet or email works but that doesn’t stop me from using it every day! You don’t have to understand vicarious faith, just express it as you pray for others! Jesus is amazed by this kind of unselfish faith that is more concerned with the needs of others than for our own needs.

3. Is accompanied by acts of loving kindness

As you read this passage, you have to be impressed with this centurion. He impressed Jesus. The Jewish leaders who lived in Capernaum were impressed as well. When they came to ask Jesus to help the centurion’s servant, they mentioned two things about him: They pointed out the centurion loved the Jewish nation—that’s highly unusual in itself. The common pattern was one of hostility and hatred between Jews and Roman soldiers. This centurion backed up his love for the Jews in Capernaum because we are told he built their synagogue. It doesn’t mean he paid for it, because few centurions had that much money. It probably means he commanded his soldiers to work to build it. I have stood many times on the very foundation of this synagogue in Capernaum. It was a beautiful synagogue and for many years, both Christians and Jews worshiped side-by-side in the town of Capernaum.

This centurion didn’t perform these acts of kindness to produce his faith; it was his amazing faith that produced these acts of loving kindness.

When you have this same kind of amazing faith, you will demonstrate it in deeds of kindness. James, Jesus’ half brother, later wrote, “Faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead.” (James 2:17) Don’t tell me (or God) you have faith if you aren’t showing kindness to others. Ephesians 4:32 says, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” A lifestyle devoid of kindness is dangerously short on faith.

A little boy once explained the difference between kindness and loving kindness to his teacher and his fellow students: “Well, if I was hungry and someone gave me a piece of bread—that would be kindness. But if they put a little jam on it, that would be loving-kindness.” I agree! Faith that amazes Jesus is always accompanied by acts of loving kindness.

A few weeks ago, I preached on performing intentional acts of kindness in Jesus’ name. I suggested you offer to pay the food bill of the car behind you in the drive-through lane at a fast food joint. A couple of weeks later, I heard about a family who went to the Shogun Restaurant. After the meal the wife asked her husband how much their bill was. He said, “Ours? Or

everybody else’s?” He bought dinner for everyone sitting around their grill! As she began to question him about the large expenditure, their child said, “Momma, don’t you remember, Brother David said if God leads you to do it, do it.” She said, “That made me zip my lip up . . . but Shogun? I thought he meant McDonalds!” Stories like that keep me going as a pastor!

4. Reflects an attitude of humility

Notice what the Jewish leaders told Jesus about the centurion. In verse 4-5 they say, “This man deserves to have you do this because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” Then skip down and compare it to the words of the centurion himself. He said, “I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not consider myself worthy to come to you.” Wow! What a picture of humility!

Sometimes we have the attitude of the Jews and we think someone deserves the blessings of God. Or worse, we think we deserve some special favor from God because of the good things we have done or the bad things we haven’t done. I’ve had people say to me when they are going through tough times, “Why is God doing this? How could God let this happen? I don’t deserve it!” They are actually say, “I deserve better than this.” Stop for a moment and consider the danger of that attitude. Do we really deserve any of the blessings of God?

Sometimes we approach God with an attitude of self-worth and self-confidence bordering on cockiness. We flash Him our personal résumé and point out all our accomplishments and try to convince Him why we are so deserving of His attention and acceptance. We wonder why heaven is silent. The attitude He honors is that which says, “I am not worthy.”

A group of tourists were visiting the home where Beethoven, the great composer, spent his last years. They came to the conservatory where his piano stood. The guide quietly said, “And here is the master’s piano.” A thoughtless young woman pushed her way from the edge of the crowd, sat down at the bench and began to play one of Beethoven’s sonatas. She paused and said to the guide, “I suppose a lot of people like me enjoy playing Beethoven’s piano.” The guide said, “Well, miss, the great Paderewski was here last summer and some in his group begged him to sit and play, but his answer was, ‘No, I cannot, I am not worthy.’”

That was the attitude of the centurion and it should be our attitude. “God, I am not worthy to receive anything good from you.” Actually, I’m grateful God doesn’t give me what I deserve. I am a sinner who has continually insulted the holiness of God by my acts of unrighteousness. If I got what I deserved, I would spend eternity in hell. I have never done anything to deserve or to earn God’s grace and forgiveness. Like the centurion, I am unworthy.

Sometimes we focus on the deficiencies in our lives and we find ourselves brooding because we don’t have all we want out of life. Instead, we need to remember every good thing we have in our life is a gift from God and we didn’t deserve it. We need to get honest with ourselves and honest with God and admit we are not worthy of His love and acceptance, yet we receive it by faith.

Brennan Manning writes, “The Christian life is not a performance; it is a relationship. It is not about being good enough to be accepted by God. It is about being honest enough with myself and God to admit that I will never be good enough to earn God’s acceptance. When I understand that with all my failures, with all of my anger, with all of my lust, with all of my dysfunctions, with all of my stupidity, I am loved by God more than I will ever be able to comprehend, I cannot come to God wearing a mask. Humble honesty is the beginning of a great adventure with God.”

5. Understands spiritual authority

The centurion makes an important statement you may miss. Notice verse 8 again. He said, “For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘go’ and he goes.” Why did he say, “I am a man under authority?” Why didn’t he just say, “I’m in charge. I order my soldiers around?” I think if he had said that, Jesus wouldn’t have been amazed. The centurion understood authority in a way that amazed Jesus. Here’s the key. Authority is not one-way—it is a two-way street. Only those who are under authority can truly exercise authority over others.

The centurion had a captain, the commander of his cohort to whom he was responsible. He was recognizing Jesus was also someone under authority. While on earth, Jesus voluntarily humbled Himself and submitted Himself to His Father, although they were co-equal and co-eternal. In the same way, the centurion recognized Jesus had authority over sickness and disease, so all He had to do was speak a word—give an order—and it would happen.

Just as the centurion got his authority from a higher power, he recognized Jesus had access to higher authority—His Father in heaven. God has set up a clearly defined system of authority in our world. When God’s chain of authority is followed, there is peace. When God’s chain of authority is ignored, chaos and misery ensue.

One of my favorite lines in the movie *Forrest Gump* is when he joins the army. The drill sergeant asks Private Gump what his sole purpose in the army was and Gump replied, “To do whatever you tell me to do Drill Sergeant, sir.” Right answer! Our purpose in life is to obey God—only in submission to His authority will we ever be able to exercise any authority. The centurion understood spiritual authority—that’s a mark of amazing faith—and Jesus was overjoyed to see it.

5. Rests on God’s Word—not visible evidence

The essence of faith is to believe God without seeing any evidence. The centurion said, “I believe you can heal my servant—just say the word!” Unbelief says, “I’ll believe it when I see it.” Amazing faith says, “I believe it whether I see it or not.” The centurion had such amazing faith he didn’t need Jesus to come and lay hands on his servant. He didn’t need Jesus to pray over him—just say the word. Actually, Dr. Luke doesn’t even give the actual words Jesus speaks. Matthew tells us Jesus said, “Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.” (Matthew 8:13) Then Dr. Luke uses a rare medical word in verse 10. It was a technical word only physicians used. He writes the servant was “well.” (Greek: *hugianonta*) It’s a word that describes “wholeness in body and spirit.”

What is faith? The Bible answers that question in Hebrews 11:1-3. “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith, we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

Faith is believing God even if you don’t see any evidence. It’s being *sure* even though you don’t see it. It’s being *certain* about that for which you have no rational reason to be certain. The writer of Hebrews starts the great faith chapter in the Bible by saying it all begins by believing God is the Creator. People often ask me what I believe about how the universe came into existence. They expect me to get my answer from Genesis 1, but Hebrews 11:3 is enough for me. God spoke it, (just say the word) and the “unmatter” (what was invisible) became matter (that which is seen). You say, “Explain that!” I can’t—it requires faith. If you can’t believe God for that, you won’t truly believe Him for anything else.

Amazing faith rests on the Word of God.

Years ago up north, a man decided to walk across the frozen Mississippi River. He started off on the thick ice, but as he got further from shore, he began to doubt the strength of the ice to hold him. Soon he decided to turn back and, afraid the ice would not hold his weight, began crawling on his hands and knees just to be safe. He heard a growing roar and thinking the ice was cracking around him, he fell on his face and prayed to God for deliverance. But then the roar passed him—it was a man leading a team of horses pulling a load of logs across the ice. When he saw that, the man jumped up and finished his stroll across the river. The river never changed during his walk, the thickness of the ice didn’t change, but the man’s faith did. The only real difference between those two men is one knew full well the strength of the ice and the other did not. If you want to do something bold on the river, you must know the ice. If you want to do something bold for the Lord, you must know the Lord. He can be trusted!

APPLICATION: WHAT IS YOUR PAIN THAT YOU NEED JESUS TO JUST “SAY THE WORD?” IT’S PROBABLE THAT HE HAS ALREADY SPOKEN.

There’s a good chance you will find a “word” in the Word (the Bible) where Jesus has spoken on your behalf. Now it’s time for you to trust Him, to demonstrate amazing faith. He has tossed out the blessing: Will you catch it?

He may take away the pain; of course He can do that. Or He may give you the grace to live with the pain; which is just as miraculous. Whether He takes the pain away, or comes to walk with you through the pain, you must accept Him by faith.

Some of you are hurting right now. It may be a physical pain or it may be an emotional pain. Whatever the source of your pain, Jesus is ready to speak His power into it. Martha Snell Nicholson is a radiant Christian. However, several years ago, she was afflicted with a chronic condition that produces pain. Listen to her amazing faith as she writes this poem:

Pain knocked upon my door and said that she had come to stay;

*And though I would not welcome her but bade her go away;
She entered in. Like my own shade she followed after me,
And from her stabbing, stinging sword, no moment was I free.
And then one day another knocked - Most gently at my door.
I cried, “No, Pain is living here, And there is not room for more.”
And then I heard His tender voice, “Tis I, be not afraid.”
And from the day He entered in - the difference it has made!
For though He did not bid her leave, (My strange unwelcome guest),
He taught me how to live with her. Oh I had never guessed
That we could dwell so sweetly here, My Lord and Pain and I,
Within this fragile house of clay While years slip slowly by!*

OUTLINE

FAITH THAT AMAZES JESUS:

1. Approaches Him as the only source of hope

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. *Hebrews 11:6*

2. Focuses on the needs of others

3. Is accompanied by acts of loving kindness

4. Reflects an attitude of humility

5. Understands spiritual authority

6. Rests on God’s Word—not visible evidence

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. *Hebrews 11:1-3*

APPLICATION: WHAT IS YOUR NEED THAT YOU NEED JESUS TO JUST “SAY THE WORD?” IT’S PROBABLE THAT HE HAS ALREADY SPOKEN.



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes