

Are you one of those people that think you have to be good enough for God to care about you and listen to your prayers? Maybe you think that God only loves good people, those who have gone to church all their lives. Maybe you think that God loves those that have money and power. Maybe you think you needed to have been born to the right set of parents and lived in the right neighborhood, gone to the right schools, associated with the right people and belong to the right social and religious organizations to get the attention of the God who created the heavens and the earth. Our scripture teaches that God listens to all that pray in humility and sincerity.

Just before the passage of scripture that I read to you, Jesus has preached a sermon about how we should relate to each other...things like who were those that were blessed and who were those who were condemned by their attitudes and behaviors; about loving your enemies; about being generous to each other; about not judging each other; about following the example of our teachers; and about living our lives on the long established teachings that lead to righteous living. He had preached this sermon outside of town, and now He entered Capernaum, His adopted hometown where He performed many of miracles that showed He was the Son of God. As he entered the town he was met by Jewish elders, messengers from a centurion. A centurion in the Roman army was a commander of a group of 100 soldiers. This centurion in Capernaum, unlike most Roman soldiers, was liked and

respected by the Jewish people in and around Capernaum because he respected them and built them a synagogue. In the Jewish community the synagogue is where the faithful came together, where they assembled for social events, where the children were taught Hebrew and the laws of Moses together, it was the center of their neighborhood. We don't know why this Roman soldier, who was not a part of the Jewish community, built their community center. It may have been because the old one had decayed, or it was not large enough to hold the people, or the inhabitants did not have the ability to build one for themselves. Although we don't know the reason why, we know that he built the community center at his own cost. He loved these people in spite of the fact that they had considered him a hated enemy. They now consider him friend and presented his request to Jesus. This centurion's servant was extremely sick and about to die. The centurion had faith that Jesus would heal the servant. Some scholars think that perhaps the reason he sent Jewish elders to present his request was that he doubted that Jesus would have listened to or granted a Roman soldier's request. The centurion sent the elder to represent his case, thinking that was a greater respect to Jesus than if he had come himself, because he was a foreigner and he thought Jesus, the prophet, would not want to talk with him. He thought the Jews were the favorite of Heaven and Jesus would listen to them.

The centurion realized that his request was asking a lot and that he really was not worthy to see Jesus so he sent others to tell Jesus that he really didn't have to set foot in his house. All Jesus had to do was speak words of authority and his servant would be healed! Jesus was amazed at the centurion and said, "I have not found such great faith even in Israel." The concept of faith is extremely important. It is vital to believe who Jesus is (the Messiah) and what He said.¹

Jesus had just taught them about loving their enemies and now Jesus demonstrates what this means in practical terms. He healed the slave of a Gentile soldier. And the person that asked was not even the humble slave, but the hated Roman, and then not directly, but through messengers. Can you imagine how Jesus stepped on the toes of the Jewish listeners by praising a Roman centurion's faith? He did not only tell them to love their enemies, but now he healed the hated one's servant and praised his faith!

Jesus was impressed that the centurion, a soldier who knew all about power and authority recognized Jesus' power and authority over diseases. He was amazed at the officer's faith. This was not a person that others would look at and think he was a person of faith. But isn't that the way people look at you and me. They look at us and think they know all about us. They treat us as unfaithful because of where we live, or our current life situation, or who we associate with. I work at

¹Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:221

Goodwill Industries in Detroit, and several years ago a man from the suburbs was asked to come for me to do an evaluation of his skills and abilities. The man looked me dead in the eye and said if he had his way he would dig a ditch around Detroit and burn the whole city down. As he was looking at me, I could only assume that he did not think my family nor I was worth living.

Jesus is not like that man. Jesus was and is willing to see our hearts. When we pray in humility and sincerity, Jesus will answer our prayers.

Jesus wants a personal relationship with each of us. He wants to be your best friend, your companion and savior. The Bible teaches that God loved each of us that He sent Jesus. Now, if we will believe in Jesus, invite him to be our friend, obey his teachings, we will have everlasting life. Jesus will send the Holy Spirit that will give us the strength to love our enemies in both what we say and how we treat them.

Thanks be to God!