

Sermon for June 22, 2025 - 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 7:1-10 EHV

Theme: Our Worthiness before God . . .

1. ... Does not come from who we are and what we've done.
2. It only comes through faith in Christ's undeserved mercy for us.

*After Jesus had finished saying all these things to the people who were listening, he went into Capernaum. <sup>2</sup>A centurion's servant, who was valuable to him, was sick and about to die. <sup>3</sup>When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. <sup>4</sup>When they came to Jesus, they begged him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, <sup>5</sup>because he loves our nation, and he built our synagogue for us."*

*<sup>6</sup>Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to tell Jesus, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, because I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. <sup>7</sup>That is why I did not consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup>For I am also a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to another one, 'Come!' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."*

*<sup>9</sup>When Jesus heard these things, he was amazed at him. He turned to the crowd that was following him and said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel." <sup>10</sup>And when the men who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.*

"Because of everything Alicia does for her family and community, God has to help her overcome her cancer. She deserves it!"

What are your thoughts on statements like that? Can a person's good deeds entitle them to divine assistance? When we pray for someone, should we emphasize their charitable deeds as the reason God should intervene?

With the account of the Centurion of Capernaum as our guide, let us explore the true reason the LORD answers prayers, under the theme: **Our Worthiness before God**, *1) does not come from who we are and what we've done. 2) It comes through faith in Christ's undeserved mercy for us.*

Part One: Our worthiness before God does not come from who we are and what we've done.

Our sermon text takes place shortly after Jesus preached His famous Sermon on the Mount. We read:

*After Jesus had finished saying all these things to the people who were listening, he went into Capernaum.*

Jesus had made that little city his home base for all his mission work in Galilee. It was Peter's home<sup>i</sup> and the place where Matthew collected taxes<sup>ii</sup> before becoming a disciple. Jesus performed

many miracles in that town,<sup>iii</sup> including healing a demon-possessed man in the synagogue that the centurion of our text had built.<sup>iv</sup> It safe to say that Jesus was well known in Capernaum among Jews and Gentiles alike.

<sup>2</sup>*A centurion's servant, who was valuable to him, was sick and about to die.*

Centurions were highly respected military officers in charge of 100 Roman soldiers. This centurion was so “good” that he gained the respect of the Jewish community (which was no small feat for a Roman soldier). He seems to have treated his servants humanely, even going so far as to seek help for a particularly well-liked slave who lay paralyzed<sup>v</sup> and near death. This centurion's most standout feature is that he was a “Gentile believer”: someone who adhered to the Jewish religion but had not undergone circumcision.

<sup>3</sup>*When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.*

Jewish elders agreeing to speak to Jesus on behalf of a gentile Roman soldier? That was a miracle in itself! Most Jews detested the Roman occupation of their land, but they didn't hate this guy because he cherished the Jews, their culture, and, most importantly, their religion. Could you imagine if some rich person built a new church for us out of his own pocket? That is what the centurion did for the Jews in Capernaum.

No wonder the Jewish elders granted the centurion's request! They held such admiration for him that they not only went to Jesus on his behalf but also went beyond that, seeking to convince Jesus that the centurion was worthy of His assistance.

<sup>4</sup>*When they came to Jesus, they begged him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy of having you do this for him, <sup>5</sup>because he loves our nation, and he built our synagogue for us.”*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, did you notice any flaws in the elders' appeal? It wasn't in their request itself, but in the reason they presented as to why Jesus should grant their request. “*He is worthy of having you do this for him,*” they claimed.

Was that true? Did all the good deeds the centurion performed make him “worthy” of Jesus' help? Let me ask you this: Does an employee “deserve” additional bonuses from their employer for fulfilling their job duties? Does a child “deserve” extra rewards for obeying their parents? If the answer is no in these cases, how can a sinful human “deserve” anything from God? We are His creatures, not His business partners! Moreover, God demands our unwavering love and obedience to His Word. Was the centurion perfect? He would be the first to confess his sins, which is one reason he sought Jesus' help.

<sup>6</sup>*Jesus went with them [the Jewish elders], not because the report of the centurion's good deeds compelled Him to help, but for His mercy's sake.*

Part Two: Our worthiness comes through faith in Christ's undeserved mercy for us.

Someone from the delegation that met with Jesus must have hurried back to tell the centurion about their conversation. The report disturbed the centurion. Why? Because they misrepresented his request! Therefore, *when [Jesus] was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to tell Jesus, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, because I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.*

The centurion was well acquainted with Jewish law. He knew that Jesus could be considered ceremonially unclean if He entered his house,<sup>vi</sup> and he did not want Jesus to face that unnecessary trouble. Why not? Because the centurion believed that Jesus was the Christ! By sending the elders to Jesus instead of going himself, the centurion confessed: "I am an unclean sinner and unworthy of your mercy. Nevertheless, trusting in your promised mercy, dear Jesus, I call to you for help."

There might have been another reason the centurion didn't want Jesus to come to his house: he didn't want people to attribute the miracle to his "worthiness" and steal glory away from Christ's mercy. In everything, the centurion wanted Jesus to be glorified.

Therefore, the centurion confessed through his friends:

*But say the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>8</sup>For I am also a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes; and to another one, 'Come!' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."*

Do you understand what the centurion was saying? He is essentially implying, "I am a man subject to others. You, however, are not subject to anyone. If I, someone who is subject to the authority of others, can simply speak and have my servants do my bidding, how much more will heaven and earth obey your command since you have all authority and are subject to none?"

<sup>9</sup>*When Jesus heard these things, he was amazed at him.*

Think about this verse for a moment: Jesus, the almighty Son of God, was amazed. At what: the good deeds this centurion performed? No, He was amazed at the centurion's humble faith. Despite being a gentile, the centurion saw, understood, and believed what few Israelites did: that Jesus was the promised Christ.

Therefore, the centurion did not approach Jesus relying on his works, but on God's mercy. In no way did he try to glorify himself, but sought Jesus' glory in everything. He freely confessed he was unworthy and unclean; yet that did not prevent him from trusting in Jesus' mercy and love. Why? Because the Scriptures promised it!

*[Jesus] turned to the crowd that was following him and said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel."*

Since the centurion humbly sought to glorify Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus publicly honoured the centurion by praising his confession and faith. Not only that, but Jesus also graciously granted the centurion's request regarding his servant.

<sup>10</sup>*And when the men who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.*

Let's return to our original question: Does a person's "goodness" ever make them deserving of God's favour? No, for we could never make ourselves worthy of anything except punishment. Why? Because God is perfectly holy and demands perfect holiness. We, on the other hand, can never be perfectly holy because even our righteous acts are tainted with sin.<sup>vii</sup>

Therefore, our worthiness can only come from Jesus and the mercy He shows us. He lived the perfect life of obedience to God's Law that we all failed to live; thereby winning the righteousness we need to stand before God. He suffered the death we deserved on the cross in payment for our sins. It's only because of His work for us that we can stand forgiven and righteous before God.

And we can only receive these gifts through repentance and faith, and not by bragging about how great we are; as King David once wrote: <sup>16</sup>*For you do not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it. You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.* <sup>17</sup>*The sacrifices God wants are a broken spirit. A broken and crushed heart, O God, you will not despise.*<sup>viii</sup>

Yes, the LORD wants you to come before him with a humble, repentant heart that joyfully believes His promises. Even though you deserve nothing from God, you can expect to receive everything. Why? Because He promises to answer you for Christ's sake. Like the centurion, you can make bold requests before God to heal friends who are sick and rescue those facing any problem, trusting that Jesus will do what you ask according to His gracious will, to the glory of His name.

In summary, **our Worthiness before God** does not come from who we are and what we've done. It comes only through faith in Christ's undeserved mercy for us. May the Holy Spirit prevent us from ever forgetting this wonderful truth. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. Matthew 8:14

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Matthew 9:9

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. Luke 4:23

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. Luke 4:33-37

<sup>v</sup> Cf. Matthew 8:6

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. Acts 10:28 & 11:2-3

<sup>vii</sup> Cf. Isaiah 64:6

<sup>viii</sup> Psalm 51:16-17 EHV