

WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY? – LUKE 7:1-10

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¹ When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. ² There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. ³ The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵ because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." ⁶ 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. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ 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." ⁹ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." ¹⁰ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.



To those who have faith to trust in God's power,

The Beatles were not the only group from Britain to influence the world in the 1960s. Monty Python was too. Monty Python was a British comedy group that has influenced the way we see comedy today. Chances are, you have heard of them, there's maybe also a chance you've seen them. One of their famous skits is *Monty Python and the search for the Holy Grail*. I'd like for you to see one scene from that skit. [Play: *Bridge of Death*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cV0tCphFMr8>]

Now besides the smile put on your faces, I showed you that for another reason. Each of the knights on the quest for the Holy Grail had to answer three questions to cross the bridge of death. Those three questions determined if that person was worthy enough to cross. Those who were not worthy (ie – couldn't answer those questions), were cast into the gorge of eternal peril.

Now what Monty Python used to make people laugh, I want to use to make a point about mankind and God. Specifically, WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY? It's certainly a question that is asked in society today: WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY? Shows like *America's got talent* asks WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY to be famous? A father asks a potential son-in-law, WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY to marry my daughter? But more importantly, WHAT MAKES YOUR LIFE WORTHY? Is it the actions that you have done, the love you have shown to people, the dedication to an ideal?

Now, if we go back to the scene from Monty Python, what if God was the bridge keeper, you were the knight, the pit was still the pit of eternal peril, and the other side was eternal life? What if the only question was WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY? How would you answer, and would that be enough to let you cross? We find the answer to this question in our gospel account for this morning from Luke chapter 7.

This morning we see clear evidence of God's power. It was seen clearly in the First lesson this morning from Joshua – as we were reminded of God's power in bringing down the walls of Jericho with nothing more than a shout from his people. We see God's power at work in our gospel – as Jesus barely utters a word of healing to a slave. The question that everyone wants to know is how do I get God's power on my side, how to I get God's power to work for me?

But God's power doesn't work that way, as much as people desire it to. Jesus showed how it worked throughout his earthly ministry, specifically here at the city called Capernaum. Capernaum is a city that is mentioned a number of times in the gospel accounts of Jesus. It was a city in the northern part of Israel, in a region of the country called Galilee. The town was set along the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee, and was along a main thoroughfare leading straight to Jerusalem. Capernaum served as a home base for Jesus when he preached and taught up here. It was here that several of his disciples lived. Peter, Andrew, James & John were all fisherman from this village. Matthew, another disciple, probably collected taxes from the previous four. And it is in Capernaum that Jesus once again finds himself after he had just preached his famous sermon on the mount.

But there was no rest for the weary, for as soon as Jesus entered the city gates, he was approached by some of the Jewish leaders. They came with an unusual request. It was a request to help out a Gentile. Normally, Gentiles and Jews did not mingle, they did not mix (much like boys and girls at a high-school dance). So it was unusual that they came with this request. Jesus found out he was a centurion in the town, and he had even helped to fund the building of the Jewish synagogue. The Jews wanted Jesus to heal this man's servant. Luke writes, **“they pleaded earnestly with him, ‘this man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.’”** We hear that Jesus went along with them.

I have to pause for a moment. Maybe it's just me, but whenever I hear that phrase “someone deserves something” it causes me to cringe – whether it's commercials saying you deserve to drive the nicest, newest car, or the media saying we all deserve to be happy. Maybe it was my upbringing in Africa that gives deserving a different meaning. Maybe it's the good Lutheran in me that says we don't deserve anything good from God. Either way, whenever I hear that phrase “someone deserves something,” my ears perk up.

So when I hear that the Jews said this centurion deserved to have Jesus help them, I cringe. If I was Jesus I know how I would have answered. I would have answered saying, “You don't deserve anything good from me, all you deserve is condemnation in hell.” And he would have been accurate in saying that. But Jesus says nothing of the sort. Instead, he goes along with the men. We see this any number of times with Jesus. He doesn't give the obvious, straight forward answer. Why does he do this? He does it so that he might lead people to the right answer – whether that's recognizing their own sinfulness, or just being patient with them.

That is certainly something that we can notice from this gospel account, especially if we have the tendency to be blunt with the truth. Because how many times have we found ourselves in the same situation? We may confess that we are saved by grace alone through faith, but how many times have we felt that we have been deserving of something. I deserve to have God bless me, because I have been

faithful to him – I have made it to church on most Sundays, I've supported the church with my offerings, I'm a hard worker, I'm friendly with everybody, I have a good marriage. We parade before God and man our accomplishments, as if somehow this is WHAT MAKES US WORTHY. We might as well talk about how humble we are too.

It's certainly something that I've run across as a pastor when I meet with people – they're always on their best behavior, showing me what great people they've been. I wonder why that is? Subconsciously, I think it's because they feel like they have to make up for something. They have to make up for when they got angry at their kids, when they gossiped about the lady in the front row of church, when they didn't stand up for their friend, or when they didn't thank God for that one blessing.

Unfortunately, this is the result of the sinful nature dwelling within us. It's the idea, that if we can have our good accomplishments outweigh our bad accomplishments, then we're fine. Unfortunately, that isn't WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY in God's eyes. He sees things as black and white. It isn't about getting above 50% on the test, it's about scoring 100% on the test. And one wrong answer, one mistake, one sin, casts us into the pit of eternal peril. It doesn't matter how much good you've done. One sin is our downfall. Even our righteous acts are like filthy rags to God. Nothing we do MAKES US WORTHY.

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So what does? I think you know the answer, but let me share with you the rest of the gospel account. On the way to the centurion's house, Jesus was stopped by some friends sent by the centurion. See, first it was the Jewish leaders, now it was his friends. They carried a message from the centurion. **"Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you."**

It was these words which Jesus was astounded by and praised. It was this man's faith which Jesus praised, it was one of only two times which Jesus praised someone's faith. Isn't it noteworthy that this was a gentile? Jesus did not even have to enter the house to heal the sick servant, he didn't even have to say a word. This is the power of God, this is the power we would love to have on our side. So what exactly did the centurion do to get this power on his side?

We must be careful not to say it was because the centurion humbled himself and (essentially) repented of his sins that his servant was healed. His humility was not the cause of his servant's health. With his humility, or counting himself not worthy, he emptied himself. He emptied himself, so that Christ could fill him up with his worthiness. This is WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY, emptying yourself of any worth at all, and letting Christ's worthiness fill you up.

How much easier said this is than done? Oftentimes, the opposite is preached – fill yourself up with all the good things in life, the things that make you happy, instead of denying yourself, instead of emptying yourself. But think about it, if we fill ourselves up with the stuff of this world, what room does God have to fill you up with his power, with his grace, with his mercy? It is God given faith which empties ourselves, trusting in God's power to fill us up. How clearly we see Jesus' power on display in the gospel account. But Jesus' power was not just limited to healing the physical body, but healing the soul.

If we are to go back to the Monty Python skit for just a moment, Jesus is the one who goes before the bridge keeper and answers the questions for us. He is the one who left death questioning its power. It is his works and his answers that provide us with the save passage across the bridge to the other side. This is WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY to cross the bridge, this is WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY to inherit eternal life, and this is WHAT MAKES YOU WORTHY. Amen.