

Second Sunday after Pentecost

LOVE OR FAITH?

Luke 7:1-10

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Analysis by Bill White

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 2 A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. 3 When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. 4 When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, 5 for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." 6 And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say 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 only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. 8 For I also 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 slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." 9 When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." 10 When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

DIAGNOSIS: FAITH IN ACTS OF LOVE

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Acts of Love for*

the Jews Gets You Help?

Jesus has just finished the “Sermon on the Plain” and a crowd accompanies him as he enters Capernaum. Some Jewish elders approach Jesus, asking him to come with them and heal a centurion’s dying slave. These messengers diligently plead with Jesus to grant this centurion’s request because, although he is a Gentile, this centurion loves the Jewish people and even built a synagogue for them. The crowd listens and watches to see how Jesus will react. Is being loving and kind to the Jews and building synagogues for them what makes this centurion’s request worthy of Christ’s help? Are doing these kinds of good works what moves Jesus to act? These Jewish elders seem to think so.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Faith in Acts of Love is Misplaced Faith*

Furthermore, if being loving and kind to the Jews and building synagogues for them is what moves Jesus to act, then what is required of anyone desiring Jesus’ help but that they trust their own efforts to do these kinds of good works? Even sincere, well-intentioned, acts of love can be idolatrous if they are the things we are trusting to win us God’s favor.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Human Acts of Love Cannot Save*

The Jewish elders’ reasoning is a precarious path. It is not the centurion’s acts of love toward the Jews but his faith that impresses Jesus and moves Jesus to act. “When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith’” (Luke 7:9). If the Jewish elders are deceived, believing it is the centurion’s good works that move Jesus to heal the centurion’s slave, they are lost.

PROGNOSIS: FAITH IN GOD'S ACT OF LOVE

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *God's Act of Love Does Save*

There is only one act of love that saves, namely, God's act of love in Jesus Christ. As John says: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17).

In Luke we read that in response to the men on the road to Emmaus comment, "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21), Jesus responds, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:25-26). And later Luke says, "Then [Jesus] opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things'" (Luke 24:45-48).

Jesus is the Messiah. Faith is trusting in the crucified and risen Jesus alone to save.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Faith in God's Act of Love is Well-Placed Faith*

As God's Messiah, Jesus has authority over all disease and death. All he need do is speak the word and diseases are healed, the dead are resurrected. Ultimately, the centurion's faith is neither in his own works of loving the Jews and building them a synagogue, nor in his religious connections to the Jewish elders. He is not worthy of Christ's help based on anything he has done himself. Rather, he is judged worthy of Christ's help

because he puts his faith in Christ—in Christ's authority over death and disease (Luke 7:6-8).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Faith in God's Act of Love Heals*

It is faith in God's loving acts in Christ that saves from sin, evil, and death. It is faith in Christ that gives eternal life. Moved by the centurion's faith, Jesus grants his request. "When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health" (Luke 7:10). Perhaps, just perhaps the Jewish elders are enlightened by this experience to see that this centurion was not worthy of this blessing from Christ because of anything he had done himself. It was the one in whom he placed his faith, Christ, who brought about the healing of the centurion's slave.