

INTRODUCTION

What picture comes to your mind when you hear the word “boss?” The secular world makes us think that a boss is more than likely a demanding figure who keeps adding pressure to his employees to get the job done. All he looks for are productivity, sales growth and profit. He uses his authority to crush the people he manages. But of course, not every boss is like that. I came across an article that describes a few CEO who do extraordinary things to show how they really care about their subordinates. The current CEO of PepsiCo, Indra Nooyi, is one of them. She grew up in India. At one time when she visited home her mom dragged her up from bed at 7 a.m., asking Indra to get ready to meet her relatives. There were lots of them! They said hi to Indra, they then quickly turned to her mom and complimented what a great mom she was for raising such a talented daughter. An idea dawned on Indra. She realized that she can have a successful career and a successful company because she has a group of great executives raised by their good parents. One by one Indra sent hand-written letters to those parents, thanking them for bringing up their children. Through this personal gesture Indra’s subordinates no longer feel that they are money-making machines for the company. This CEO uses her authority to care for the people over which she rules.

In our story today in Luke chapter 7 there is a centurion who used his authority to care for his sick servant. At that time centurions were Roman citizens. In other words, the Jews saw them as Gentiles. By the title “centurion” these military officers led a team of one hundred or so soldiers. The centurion in our story sent some Jewish elders to ask Jesus to heal his servant. When Jesus was approaching his home the centurion dispatched a second group of delegates asking Jesus not to come to his house. The centurion believed that Jesus was capable of healing his servant without going to his home. The story has a happy ending. The servant got well and Jesus complimented the centurion for his faith. Just like him you may also be asking Jesus for help with a problem at hand. From this story we shall learn that true faith is showed in putting our trust in God’s power. Faith in itself cannot accomplish anything. Faith works because there is a God who is willing to listen to our prayer and works out His will in us.

EXPLANATION

As we study the passage I would like to draw your attention to compare how the Jewish elders and the centurion begged Jesus for help. The first group of people made their plea based on man’s strength, while the centurion made his plea based on God’s strength.

1. 根據人的表現去懇求 A Plea Based on Man’s Strength

The Jewish elders made their plea to Jesus based on man’s strength. They thought that the centurion deserved Jesus’ help because he was a good leader. Those elders were possibly a group of senior leaders of the local synagogue. The centurion sent them to ask Jesus for help. Listen to how the elders advocated for the centurion in **verses 4-5**: 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.” The word “deserves” in the original Greek text literally means “having enough weight.” The word-picture behind the term is when you put something on a scale you have to put enough weight on the other side to counter balance it to determine how heavy the object is. The elders reasoned to Jesus: “Since this man is a good person you should help him.” Before we examine the argument of those elders there is something we can learn from them. They made a plea to Jesus on behalf of a Gentile. As Christians we should pray for others, even for non-believers. God gives His children a wonderful privilege that we can bring any request to His throne of grace. I was in Tina’s Sunday school class recently. She shared a story about how some missionaries prayed for others in need. A team of missionaries were serving in a particular city. One project they were working on was to help the local people dig a well. However, after the hole was dug no matter how hard the team tried they could not pump any water out. The local folks were getting impatient. They asked: “Isn’t your God very powerful? Why don’t you pray to Him for help?” One brother thought if he prayed and nothing happened then not only he discredited himself, he might bring shame to the Lord too. So what happened? The brother prayed for the local people that they could have water. God responded positively and when the team tried again water came out!

Going back to our story. The Jewish elders argued that the centurion deserved Jesus’ help. The centurion proved that he was good by loving the Jews and building a synagogue for the local people. As a Roman officer the centurion had no obligation to treat the Jews he ruled over nicely. We may think that perhaps he just wanted to maintain a good relationship with the locals. Regardless of his intent, this time the centurion was not asking Jesus a favor for himself. He was presenting a request on behalf of a servant he loved. Why did he care so much about this servant? **Verse 2** tells us: There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The servant was in a critical condition. The description “value highly” may mean that he was a precious servant to his master. Perhaps he was a very capable workman whom the centurion would not like to lose. The adjective can also mean that the servant was someone the centurion highly esteemed. Therefore, it is likely that the centurion was a noble person who genuinely cared about even a lowly slave. The elders made their plea to Jesus based on man’s strength. Do you pray like that too? You may say: “Lord, this person deserves your help because he is a good Christian. He serves you faithfully in the church. Please fulfill his need (whether he is unemployed, has a crisis in his immigration status or suffers from a severe illness).” Perhaps a single sister may pray: “Lord, this young man has all the good qualities I am looking for. He deserves salvation because he is a morally upright person. If he becomes a Christian then I can consider dating him.” Very often when we present our plea to God we do so based on our own strength. We think that we deserve God’s help because how good we are, how many years we have been in Christ or how much money we offer to the church. Deep down inside we feel that God owes us a favor. Do you see the problem? If we pray like that then we completely misunderstand what God’s grace is. We mistakenly think that we can exchange what we have and what we do for God’s kindness. Brothers and sisters, if you pray like that you are like replacing an idol you worshipped on the altar in the past with our God. Based on our own strength do not deserve God’s help because there is nothing we can bargain with God. The reason why God answers our prayer is that out of His sovereignty He chooses to grant us grace. Also, in the process of praying and waiting we build up our relationship with God. The fact that God answers our prayer despite who we are keeps us humble. None of us is so important that he can manipulate God. None of us is too inconspicuous that God would ignore either.

2. 根據神的大能去懇求 A Plea Based on God's Strength

From this story we can see that true faith is showed in putting our trust in God's power. If it is a wrong reason for the Jewish elders to make their plea based on man's strength, then what would be a correct reason for one's prayer? Comparing to the elders, the centurion made his plea based on God's strength. He showed his faith in Jesus' healing power when he conveyed his message through some friends. He said in **verses 6-7**: ...“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. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.” Whereas the Jewish leaders argued that the centurion deserved Jesus' help, twice in these verses the centurion considered himself undeserved. He felt undeserved to have Jesus come to his house, and he did not even think he deserved to go see Jesus either. We said earlier that the centurion was a Roman citizen. Since he governed a Jewish district he understood the people's custom. Even though the centurion had ruling power over the Jews he knew that they looked down on the Gentiles as ceremonially unclean. Therefore, the centurion would like to avoid causing Jesus embarrassment for entering his home, thinking that Jesus might be criticized by the Jews for doing so too. Besides those possible considerations a more important thing is that the centurion believed Jesus should not come to his house because He did not need to get near to the servant in order to heal his sickness. The end of verse 7 we just read indicates the centurion trusted that Jesus' words alone had healing power. Since the centurion served in the military he knew very clearly how authority was exercised. Let us read on in **verse 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.” The centurion understood that he had to submit to those leaders who were above his rank. Similarly, he had some subordinates who obeyed him. All it took was an order to dispatch people of a lower rank to get things done. The centurion had the same knowledge about how Jesus' authority worked. Jesus only had to give a verbal command and the disease in the servant would be removed. The illness was like an agent that submitted to Jesus' authority. Indeed the servant was well when the friends of the centurion returned home. In **verse 9** Jesus complimented the centurion's faith in Him: 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.” Jesus contrasted the faith of the Jews and this Gentile. Some of the Jews witnessed the power of Jesus with their own eyes but they still chose not to believe in Him. This Roman citizen barely heard about the healing power of Jesus, but he had faith in Jesus. Jesus choose to help the centurion because He found favor in this man's faith. The centurion expected a positive response from Jesus not because of his military rank or because the elders claimed that he was a nice guy, but it was because He saw Jesus as a man of authority. From the context we cannot determine if the centurion was certain about Jesus' deity. He might look at Jesus as a prophet only. However, he put his trust on Jesus according to what he heard about what Jesus did. He did not even have to see Jesus perform the miracle healing in front of his servant. The centurion believed that Jesus had healing power in His words. Today, we pray to a God whom we cannot see. How can we put our trust in Him? Many seeker friends have the same legitimate question in mind. We can find the answer in our story today. The centurion believed in Jesus' healing power based on what he heard about Jesus. Our faith in God is based on the record of His mighty work in the Bible. We can objectively verify that the content in the Bible is true. That is a huge topic that is beyond the focus of today's message. Our seeker friends may consider joining

us in the Seekers' Class Sunday school if you are interested in learning more about the Bible. Beside the validity of the Bible, our faith can also grow based on how God answered others' prayer. Testimonies from brothers and sisters whose diseases were healed or whose broken relationship were restored through prayer should encourage us to put our trust in the Lord. In addition to all those objective and personal evidences every believer encountered the same miracle when Jesus saved us from the pit of sin and brought us to His Kingdom of Light. In all of the above experience we witness God's power at work in our lives.

CONCLUSION

True faith is showed in putting our trust in God's power. After we have studied the story we can draw some similarities between the centurion and Jesus. The centurion loved those he reigned. He loved the Jews and he loved his sick servant. He used his authority to help a servant he loved. Jesus rules over the whole world. He loves everyone He created. Even today, Jesus exercises His authority to care for you and me.

In closing let me share a story about how another CEO cares about his employees. Nevzat Aydin and his partners founded the largest food delivery company in Turkey. In 2015 a German firm acquired his company. Instead of putting all the earnings from the acquisition into his own pocket Aydin paid out \$ 27 million to over 100 of his employees. Those staff had a regular monthly salary of no more than \$ 2,000. But Aydin gave each of them an average bonus of \$ 237,000. Those of you who are envy of them have to move to Turkey to work for this boss! Aydin did not have to do that. He could have kept all the money to himself. He could have spent a portion of the profit and organized an extravagant feast for his staff. Everyone would still be very grateful to him. Aydin generously rewarded his employees because he loved them. Our God is the sovereign Lord of the whole universe. He has all the power and resources at His dispense. God bestows abundant grace out of His love to us. Jesus' grace extended across a cultural barrier to a Gentile, and over geographical distance to a patient. No matter where we are and what situation we are in Jesus' grace is there.