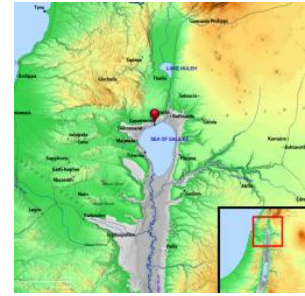


## I. Introduction

Good morning! In today's passage, Jesus returns to Capernaum and performs an amazing healing miracle. At the time, Jesus was living in Capernaum, teaching in the synagogue, and doing many miracles, so Jesus would have been well known to the people of the area, both Jewish and gentile. You may also remember that we saw, back in Luke 1:3, that Luke's gospel is for all of us, but it was also specifically addressed to a Roman official named Theophilus. Theophilus might have had a strong interest in today's passage, since it involves a Roman centurion.



We don't meet very many centurions these days, so perhaps I should explain a little about them. The Roman military was organized into legions, cohorts, and centuries. Sometimes they were smaller, but in theory a legion consisted of 6,000 men organized into 10 cohorts. Each cohort had about 600 men organized into 6 centuries, and each century had about 100 men, which were divided into 10 "tent groups." A centurion commanded the 100 men of a century, with minor officers below him leading each tent group.



Several Roman centurions appear in the New Testament, and it is interesting to notice that they are generally good guys. For example, **Matthew 27:54** records that when Jesus was crucified, a centurion who was there proclaimed that Jesus was the Son of God. **"When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!'"** And in **Acts 10:1-2**, we read that, **"At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly."** Then, the Lord sent Peter to preach to Cornelius and the Holy Spirit came upon his household, and they were baptized.

Roman centurions usually served for 20 years and then retired, and it seems likely that the centurion in today's Bible passage was at or near retirement, since he seems to have established a permanent home near Capernaum. I feel like I have a lot in common with the centurion, since I served in the Marines for 20 years and retired with the rank of captain, which is the modern equivalent of centurion. So like the centurion, I also am a retired military man who believes in Jesus and lives in a foreign land.



Nobody likes war, and there are various opinions about the military. But military service does teach a person a few things; and, if you are in the military for very long, on then that you learn to understand very well is authority. Authority is a theme of today's story; we will see how the centurion understood that Jesus is the One who has all authority. Let's read Luke 7:1-10.

## II. Scripture Luke 7:1-10 (NIV)

[1] When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, 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.

### III. Teaching

In this passage, the centurion does not meet Jesus directly, but instead he sends others to speak to Jesus for him. However, if you look at this painting (*"The Centurion Kneeling at the Feet of Christ,"* by Joseph-Marie Vien, 1752), you can see the centurion kneeling before Jesus. The painting, you see, is based on the version of the story that appears in Matthew 8, and in Matthew there is no mention of the centurion sending others; it reads as if the centurion himself went to meet Jesus.



Some people are troubled by differences like these, but I think we should actually be encouraged in our faith when we see minor differences between the gospels. These differences prove that the gospel writers are working independently of each other and not copying each other. Consider this, when someone makes up a story and others copy it, then they tend to all tell the story pretty much the same way because they have no personal knowledge to add to the story. On the other hand, when real people write about real events, there are always some differences, because each person knows different details about the event. The differences we see between the gospels prove that these stories were not made up by some clever storyteller and copied. It is evidence that the Bible stories are a history of real people and real events. In many cases, the Bible authors were eyewitnesses. And so, they each tell the stories in their own way.

Luke and Matthew both tell about how Jesus healed the centurion's servant, and about how Jesus praised the centurion's faith. The key features of the story are the same, but Matthew left out the information about the centurion sending others as his representatives. Perhaps Matthew considered that information as unnecessary detail because when the representatives spoke for the centurion, it was basically the same as if the centurion was himself present saying the same things.

Let's take a closer look. **Luke 7:2-3, "There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant."** During his years of military service, the centurion had probably seen many people suffer and die. But his heart had not been hardened; the centurion cared about people without regard for social status or race. He cares about his servant. He has friends among the Jews.

**Luke 7:4-5, "When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.""** The Jews generally considered the Roman soldiers as enemies and did not want to have anything to do with them. But this centurion had impressed them. They recognized that this man was different than the others; he cared about them and about their nation. And he believed in the God of the Jews as the true God. The centurion had faith in God, and he expressed his faith in action. He contributed money for the building of their synagogue, and perhaps he even worked on the construction with his own hands. Despite the enmity between Rome and Israel, the centurion won friends among the Jews, even among the Jewish elders.

Let's get back to the text. **Luke 7:6, "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."** The Jewish elders had a high opinion of the centurion, they said, **"this man deserves to have you do this...."** But the centurion says, **"I do not deserve...."** Here we see that the centurion is a man of humility. He knows that the Jews did not usually enter Roman homes and he does not want to cause trouble for Jesus. Jesus was willing to go; Jesus was already on His way. But the centurion says it is not necessary for Jesus to come personally. The centurion understands authority, and he knows that the authority of Jesus is not limited by distance. He asks only that Jesus command that the servant be made well.



**Luke 7:8, “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 understands authority. He knows what it means to command and what it means to obey. And the centurion has faith; he believes in the God of Israel. And He believes that Jesus has the authority of God, the authority to command life and death and judgment and deliverance. He knows that if Jesus commands it, then his servant will be healed.

**Luke 7:9, “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.'”** The Jews were raised in the study of the Old Testament Scriptures and they knew a lot about the miracles God had done and about the promises that a Messiah would come. But most of them did not have a real and living faith in the power and love of God. But somehow this centurion, who was a foreigner in the land, had a faith which was certain and unwavering. Clearly, the centurion had heard about the Creator God and believed. But even more, the centurion had heard about Jesus and believed in Him as Lord and Savior.

It is easy for people who never leave their homeland to believe that the religious ideas that they grew up with are the truth. But when people travel to a foreign land, they encounter belief systems that are different than their own. This often causes them to reexamine their own beliefs. Sometimes the result is a new confidence in the same things they believed before. And sometimes the result is that the person feels the need to change their thinking and beliefs.

Here at OIC, many of us have experience with these things. Those of us who come from Christian backgrounds are challenged to reexamine our Christian faith when we come to Japan and encounter Buddhism and Shintoism. Most Christians, I think, find that when they carefully compare Christianity to other religions that their faith in Jesus is confirmed and strengthened. On the other hand, quite a few of our Japanese members are here today because at some point they traveled overseas and were challenged to reexamine their beliefs when they encountered Christians in America, England, Australia, Korea, China, or other lands.



If you are a Japanese person who came to know Jesus while living overseas, then you also have something in common with the centurion. In the Roman culture, they worshipped the many gods of Roman and Greek mythology. But, because of his military duties, the centurion came to live in Israel. Far away from his home, he was confronted by new ideas and beliefs. And when he was forced to reexamine his own beliefs, he came to believe that the God of the Jews was the true God, and He also came to believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior.



#### **IV. Conclusion**

We see the centurion's strong, humble faith especially clearly in **Luke 7:7. “That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.”** All the centurion asked for was a single word from Jesus. Jesus, **“say the word,”** and all will be well. That's faith. We don't know exactly where the centurion learned about Jesus. But he knew. The centurion knew that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior, and the Great Healer for all people. The centurion knew that Jesus had all authority and that his servant would be made well if Jesus gave the word.

Jesus didn't need to go see the servant or perform some kind of ritual or repeat some kind of chant. A simple word from Jesus was enough. Jesus praised the faith of the centurion and granted his desire. **Luke 7:10, “Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.”** Did you notice that the Jewish elders praised the good works of the centurion, but Jesus praised the centurion's faith? The centurion's works demonstrated his faith, but it was the faith itself that Jesus praised. The centurion, like us, was saved by grace, received through faith. **Ephesians 2:8, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”** Let's pray.

**V. Closing Prayer**