

Weaving the Word

The Centurion's Servant

Part 52 – November 29, 2015

Has anyone ever taken advantage of your authority? Friends or family wanting special treatment, in your place of employment, even though it violates the authority you're under?

"You can *get me in*." "You can *set one aside*." "You can *throw in some fries*." "This is *me*." "You owe me." "Think of *all I've done for you*." "I thought we were *friends*." "C'mon ... *I deserve it*."

If you've ever had *any authority* at all, odds are someone tried to take advantage.



And, in so doing, **they denounce your true authority**, because **they reject the authority behind your authority**. They're saying: "**I don't recognize the authority of the one who gave you authority.**" Therefore they're really saying: "**I desire your power but I deny your true authority.**"

This is how Jesus must've felt, early in His public ministry, *when ...*



... a certain **royal official** whose son lay sick at **Capernaum** ... went to him and **begged him to come** and heal his son, who was close to death. [**My son deserves this; he's a good boy; we go to synagogue; I'll donate to your cause; just name it!**] "**Unless you people [His Chosen People] see miraculous signs and wonders,**" Jesus told him, "**you will never believe.**" – John 4:47b-48 NIV

Believe *what*? **He's begging for Jesus' power**. But, **he's not bowing to His true authority** ... yet.

The royal official said, "**Sir, [we don't have all day, here!] come down before my child dies.**" Jesus replied, [**No. I'm not coming. But ...**] "**You may go. Your son will live.**" The man **took Jesus at his word and departed**. [**But, when he learns of his son's long-distance healing**] ... **he and all his household [in Capernaum] believed.** – John 4:49-50, 53b NIV

In what? That **the Son had come in the Father's authority!**

Jesus was consistently saying things like: "**By myself I can do nothing.**" (John 5:30b) "**I have come ... not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.**" (John 6:38) And, "**The Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.**" (John 12:49)

And, **though they literally begged for Jesus' power, they refused to** recognize God's authority within Him, and **bow to Him as Lord**.

Savior? "Sure." Healer? "I'll have that!" But, Son of God? ... "Not so much."

How about you? Do you honor Jesus with a place of supreme authority in every area of your life; and, seek to live from that perspective; and, confess with sorrow when you fail?

Or do you find yourself more-or-less in take-advantage begging mode?



Less than a year after healing the Royal Official's son, Jesus selected His twelve and taught 'em on the hill above the Sea.



When Jesus had finished saying these things, in the hearing of the people, the crowds were **amazed** [lit. struck or knocked over] at his teaching, because he taught as one **who had authority**, [exousia: the power of influence and privilege] and not as their teachers of the law. When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. He entered Capernaum. There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus ... – Matthew 7:28-8:1a; Luke 7:1-3a NIV



The Centurion was a Roman military officer, who commanded about 100 soldiers. And, Rome was occupying Israel; and, this Centurion was stationed in Capernaum, to maintain authority and to crush rebellion. So, **how do you suppose he heard about Jesus?**



Well, **Capernaum's the home of the once begging, now believing, Royal Official**; and, the village itself was smaller than our parking lot. They crossed paths at work *and* at home.



And, **this is where Matthew had his tax booth**. And, where **Peter and Andrew and James and John had their family fishing business**. And, where **Jesus had His home and headquarters**. Jesus taught in the synagogue. **Jesus cast out a demon in the synagogue!**

How in the world could the Centurion *not have heard about Jesus?*

He built the synagogue! Not the sand-colored portion, that part was rebuilt after the one the Centurion built was destroyed by the Romans in 70^{AD}. But, the Centurion's foundation is still there!

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion **came to him**, [that is, he spoke to Him by way of messenger] **asking for help**. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." [Now, Luke relates the same event, but from the messengers' perspective] ... and sent some elders of the Jews to him, **asking him to come** [not, as in: "to ask him to come," but, as in: "who were asking him to come"] and heal his servant. [They not only add the "asking to come" part] 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.**" ["He's a good man; he's given so much; he really deserves this"] Jesus said to him, [the Centurion, through dispatch] "I will go and heal him." So Jesus went with them. [Those who begged on his behalf] – Mat 8:5-7; Luke 7:3-6 NIV

This is when the story *really takes off!*



You ever ask someone to communicate something on your behalf, and they end up completely misrepresenting what you intended? Well, **the Centurion dealt with crowd control in many situations.** And, **He's seen the clambering crowds trying to touch Jesus.** And, **he wants to disassociate himself from *all that*.** And, being closely associated with the synagogue, he knows that, according to Rabbinical Law, Jesus would be ceremonially defiled by associating with, or entering the home of, a gentile. (Acts 10:28)

So, unlike the Official who begged Jesus to come, **the Centurion tries to convey his unworthiness to even approach such a Holy One, and his trust in Jesus' judgment and authority on his behalf.** But, his messengers return and excitedly tell him how they told Jesus how *deserving* he is and how he built the synagogue and how they convinced Jesus to come and how He's on his way *right now!*

They've made it appear that he couldn't trouble himself to go to Jesus, and expected Jesus to drop everything to come serve him! Do your prayers ever convey a similar expectation?

What he intended as humility was misrepresented as *superiority!* Because, his messengers don't respect Jesus' *true* authority. He's mortified. Horrified. Humiliated. "You told Him *I deserve* to have my request granted, because I put a roof over your heads? *That's not how true authority works!*" And, he's never dispatched a follow-up with *greater speed!*

Jesus was **not far from the house** [and *it's a small village!*] when the centurion **sent friends** [*I'm not so sure they didn't come flying out by the seat of their tunics!*] to say to him: "Lord, **don't trouble yourself**, for [*"I may have built the synagogue, but,"*] **I do not deserve** to have you come under **my roof**. [*Listen to this poor guy try to re-convey his original intent*] **That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.** But **just say the word**, [*Or: speak the command*] and my servant will be healed. **For I myself am a man under authority**, [*How is it that this Centurion gets what everyone else has missed?*] **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." When Jesus heard this, he was **amazed** at him, and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. – Mat 8:8-10; Luke 7:6-9 NIV

The word the Centurion uses for "Come" is the same word Jesus used when He cast the demon out in the Synagogue. (Mark 1:21-21; Luke 4:33-36) When they were *all amazed* at Jesus' authority ... *especially one*. But, some in that Capernaum crowd were saying that Jesus' authority was coming from the *Prince of Demons!* (Mat 12:24; Luke 11:15) **They don't recognize, respect, or revere His authority because He doesn't meet their expectations.** One being: *killing Centurions!*

They were sure their Messiah would defeat their Roman oppressors. And, here's this Centurion (one of the oppressors that they thought the Messiah would come to free them from), *saying*, "**Because I recognize, respect, and revere your authority, I have no expectations.**" **They had a whole laundry list ... do you?**



There's only one other time Jesus is *amazed* at someone's faith. Know where? It was in His hometown (Nazareth):

And he was **amazed** at their **lack of faith**. – Mark 6:6a NIV

[Why?] All ... were **amazed** [lit. struck or knocked over, just like on the hillside] at the gracious words that came from his lips. **"Isn't this Joseph's son?"** they asked. **"Isn't this Mary's son?"** (Mark 6:3) Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" – Luke 4:22-23 NIV



The Centurion approached Jesus as a finish line, a peace treaty. His only goal was to know that his need had been conveyed.

Once accomplished, he was ready to rest and trust in Jesus' command. And, this was a major life-and-death situation of one He loved. But, he recognized the Authority behind Jesus' authority.

Jesus' own Chosen approached Him as a starting line, an opportunity to be *seized*. They were ready to beg and bargain and plead their case ... and offend the Father in any number of ways. But, they're long gone. Question now is: **Which way do you pray?**

Because, **there can be no rest in an approach with no trust.**

I say to you [the messengers and those like 'em] that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." – Mat 8:11-12 NIV

This Roman Centurion was both *in* authority and *under* authority in an occupied land; and he's either a convert or a sympathizer. So, he's keenly aware of what it's like to have people, probably these *very same* people, plead and beg and try and take advantage of one's power while rejecting their source of authority.

Then Jesus **said to the centurion**, [probably calling out toward a window or door of his nearby house, knowing the mortified man is likely listening] **"Go!** [There it is; all he'd asked for. One word; but, he gets a few more] **It will be done just as you believed it would."** [Not because his *faith* had power; we're not called to have faith in our faith. But, *all because* he humbled himself under the Authority behind the authority of Jesus] **And his servant was healed at that very hour.** Then **the men who had been sent** [from the Good Shepherd's own flock] **returned** [sheepishly and, I hope, with apologies] to the house and found the servant well. – Mat 8:13; Luke 7:10 NIV

And found yet another household in Capernaum, **not only believing in Jesus' power but, recognizing and revering His authority.**

Do you?