

When I was 4 years old, I had a chance to be a hero. I was at my cousin's birthday party, running around in the backyard. We ended up behind the swing set, where with impeccable timing, my cousin's head and a backwards-traveling swing met at the same place, at the wrong time. As the large gash on his head started pouring blood, it was pretty obvious to 4-year old me, that I needed to find help!

This was my moment! I took off, running as fast as I could to the adults in the front yard. When I got there, I headed straight for my Grandpa, and breathlessly explained what happened.

At face value, that might not seem like that bad of a decision. After all, my Grandpa is a wonderful, caring man. But it wasn't the best decision, because my Grandpa was a farmer. Also at the party that day, was my mom, who worked three decades as... a nurse! Instead of getting help from a woman trained and equipped to take care of medical emergencies, I sought help from a man trained and equipped to milk cows and harvest crops. My cousin still brings that up, 27 years later!

I share that story not just for self-deprecating humor, but because it highlights an important question for us to consider. When you're in trouble, where do you turn for help? We need to reflect on that, because at times, we very easily turn to someone or something that won't really help. We need to reflect on that, because there is only one who can rescue us in any and every situation. That's highlighted for us today by a man known as "the Centurion."

Centurions were professional Roman soldiers who held authority over a group of 100 soldiers. This centurion was stationed in Capernaum, a city on the Sea of Galilee that served as Jesus' unofficial home base. Somewhat surprisingly, this centurion loved the Jewish people. That was surprising, because Roman soldiers generally despised the Jews they were commanded to keep in line. He loved them so much that he even personally financed the building of the synagogue in Capernaum.

Earlier, Jesus had driven out a demon in that same synagogue. Because word of Jesus' power certainly spread throughout town, it's no surprise that when one of the centurion's servants, "**whom [he] valued highly, was sick and about to die,**" he knew who to run to for help.

First, the centurion sent a contingent of Jewish elders to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant. That's noteworthy, because this centurion was a Roman Gentile, which was the double whammy of Jewish disdain. But they respected this centurion so much, they urgently pleaded with Jesus, "**This man deserves to have you do this.**" That works righteous thinking was very fitting for the Jewish train of thought, but it's also the way people think today too.

When disease or disaster strikes, have you ever thought, "How could God do this to me?" So often, people use tragedy or hardships as reasons to doubt the existence of a loving God. Where are those thoughts born from other than self-righteous pride that believes God owes us for being so wonderful? If we selfishly expect that God owes us his power, rather than humbly trusting him to graciously provide— we're like a kid on Christmas, drowning in presents, but pouting because we didn't get one specific toy.

The centurion could have thought that way. He was wealthy, powerful, and generally got what he wanted. But rather than pride or selfish expectation, the centurion displays humility and trust.

"[Jesus] 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. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed."

This centurion understood that he was a sinner who didn't deserve to even stand in Jesus' presence, let alone earn something from him! But although he knew he was undeserving, he still trusted that Jesus would do it. The centurion trusted that Jesus was so powerful, he didn't even have to come to the house. He believed that Jesus just had to say the word.

That's what the centurion meant when he talks about being a man of authority. Because of his military authority, the centurion could simply make a command, and his soldiers obeyed.

The centurion acknowledged that in an even greater way, Jesus holds authority over all things! As true God, Jesus could speak and save that servant's life, because he's the God who brought forth all life at Creation. Jesus could speak and heal a dying man's body, because he is the God who knit that body together in a mother's womb. Because he has authority over all things, Jesus could tell sickness to go, and it would flee. He could tell health to come, and it would arrive. With God, all things are possible, because God possesses power over all things.

That's why whatever it is in life that's got you feeling powerless—your health; your mental health; your finances; your marriage; your family; an addiction; whatever it is-- you don't have to feel powerless against it. If you run to any other person or any other thing besides God for your strength, you will feel powerless—because ultimately, those things have limited power.

But through faith in Jesus, you are connected to the God who holds power and authority over everything in this world. The God who comforts, ***"Take heart, I have overcome the world."*** Through faith in Jesus, you are fully equipped to face any and every trouble in your life with complete trust.

Think how much better that is than the alternative! Those who don't believe in the almighty God can only hope to be rescued from troubles through lucky breaks, shots in the dark, or total coincidences.

How much better to know that the all-powerful God will rescue you from all things! Or to know that even when things don't happen according to your plans, God's answer is never, "Sorry, I tried, but I just wasn't strong enough." God's answer is always, "Trust me. This is for your good. And when the time is right, I've got the power to take care of it. I promise." That completely changes the way we view the struggles and trouble in our lives. We believe in the God who has the power to take care of every trouble! So there's no reason to feel powerless.

And the centurion's trust in Jesus' power was warranted. As the centurion's friends traveled the short distance back to relay Jesus' promise, ***"It will be done just as you believed it would,"*** they found it had already happened! The servant was completely well. Not slightly improving, or taking steps forward. Completely healthy! From death's door to perfect health, simply because Jesus spoke. This was a powerful miracle that displayed Jesus' ultimate power!

But do you know what I find really interesting about this account? Luke only spends one verse talking about that powerful healing miracle Jesus performs. And it reads almost like it's just tacked on at the end. ***"Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well."*** That's it. No description of everyone's astonishment, or the joy that must have filled the centurion's heart, or the praises that servant must have sung after Jesus rescued him from death. Undoubtedly, those things happened, but Luke doesn't record them for us.

And I think the reason why, is because God wants us focus on the more important powerful miracle in this account—not the healing, but the faith of the centurion!

There were so many stumbling blocks to trip up this man's faith. He was a Roman Gentile, with a dearly loved servant at death's door. He was wealthy, powerful, and well-respected. And as he said, he felt guilty of his sin, and unworthy to even be in the presence of Jesus. All of these things could have driven him away from Jesus, not to him.

And on top of all that, the Bible tells us that centurion, and every single person, including all of us, ***"Were God's enemies," "were once alienated from God," "by nature objects of wrath."*** On our own, we can't trust in God's power. On their own, all people, including you and me were ***"dead in your transgressions and sins."***

That is, until the God who tore down the walls of Jericho tore down the walls of our hearts; the God who speaks and makes a cold, dead heart start beating again, speaks through his Word to bring cold, dead hearts of unbelief to life through faith. That's why Jesus could joyfully marvel at the beautiful gift of faith he hadn't found elsewhere in Israel. That's why the centurion could have such strong, trusting, faith-without-sight belief...because God had performed a miracle, not on the centurion's servant, but on the centurion's heart.

That's the same powerful miracle that all of us have experienced! At face value, it doesn't seem as jaw dropping as the healing of the servant, but it's much more miraculous by far! Yes, Jesus rescued the centurion's servant from death...but eventually that servant died again. But through the miracle of faith, Jesus gives eternal life that will never end.

In the 5 years of my ministry here, the number of healing miracles like Jesus did for servant, have been low. There have been some, grim diagnoses that by God's grace ended in health. But by God's grace, I have been able to see, and sometimes play a small role in God's daily powerful miracles.

Baptisms where children born as enemies of God are welcomed into God's family. I've seen God's Word produce immense amounts of cheerful, Gospel-motivated giving, service, and sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom. I've seen God's Word work to bring the straying back to repentance, and to save "lost causes" everyone else gave up on. I've seen God's Word produce unshakable faith that trusts completely in God's power, even in the face of heartbreaking adversity, hardship, sickness, and even death. I've seen miracle after miracle.

And although I won't be here with you to see it continue happening in person, I trust completely that God will continue producing miracles for you and through you here at Mount Olive. I believe that, because God's power has worked that miracle in my heart too.

My prayer for you is this, dear brothers and sisters: When you're in trouble, run for help from the one who is best able to rescue you; the one who has already saved you. May he bless you and keep all of us in his almighty hands. May God be with you, 'til we meet again. Our all-powerful God, whose unlimited power is only matched by his unlimited love for you.