

Five Centurions

by Bayless Conley

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Will you pray with me right now that, I just think it's important, that we sort of position and set our hearts to receive from God.

Father, we come in Jesus' name. Thank You that we have instant and bold access into Your presence. So we come without shame, without fear. We come boldly, and we ask You for grace, Father. I pray that the grace of healing would be released. I pray that the grace of illumination, that Your Word would dawn upon these hearts of ours, Father.

Lord, we want an encounter with You. May today prove to have been memorable, a day that marked us, a day that changed us, a day that we took Your Word onboard in a new way that set us on the pathway that You have set and marked out for us. Lord Jesus, we pray, above everything, that You would be glorified. We love You, Lord. We thank You for coming to redeem us. We thank You for sending the Holy Spirit to empower us, to guide us, to strengthen us. And it's in Your precious name we pray. Amen.

If you would open your Bible, please, to Luke chapter 7, I'm going to share a message with you that I've entitled "Five Centurions." A centurion was an officer in the Roman army that was over a hundred men. The word "century" (a hundred). Centurion kind of makes sense. Sort of like a captain that ruled over a hundred men.

And it's interesting. If you read through the Gospels and through the epistles, there are numerous centurions mentioned, and almost always, they're woven into the fabric of an amazing story.

And so we are going to look, time permitting, at five centurions and sort of the stories that were woven around their lives. And look at some of the important lessons that we can learn from these centurions and their stories.

And the first one, well, he's the one that we hear more about than any others. This is the centurion with great faith. Luke 7:1–10,

¹ Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. ² And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. ³ So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, ⁵ "for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue."

⁶ Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. ⁷ Therefore I did not even think myself

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worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

⁹ When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" ¹⁰ And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.

All right. Jesus said the centurion had great faith, even a greater faith than He found among any of His Jewish brethren.

And I just want to quickly share with you four qualities that made this man's faith great. Number one: His faith was unselfish. The focus of his faith was the benefit of another person, not himself.

He wasn't even thinking, "Man, if I lose this servant, it's going to be really expensive to replace him. And so I need to do something about that." No. The Bible says his servant was dear unto him.

The whole thing—his sending to Jesus to see if he would come and heal, it was all about the welfare of another and about that other person completely.

Secondly, his faith was great because his faith was active. In our text, we read when he heard about Jesus, he did something. He sent the elders of the Jews to Him. He didn't just sit back and say, well, if it's God's will, I know that He's going to find me. If this is something God wants to happen. No, he heard, and he did. Faith is expressed through action.

In fact, the book of James says faith without actions that correspond is dead. It's powerless. It's impotent. It can't do anything.

We, for many, many years, every Sunday night taught on the subject of divine healing. And I remember a woman that began to come, this was years ago in our old building, and her daughter would bring her. And the woman had been in a very serious car accident some years before. We got to know her a little bit. And so she had been coming maybe, I don't know, a month, maybe a couple months, maybe.

And she had a walking stick. And her daughter always used to have to guide her and help her. She couldn't walk without that stick and without the help of her daughter on her arm. And when she would turn to speak to you, she couldn't, like, turn her head. I guess the injuries were to her spine and her neck. She'd have to turn like this, her whole body, to be able to speak to you and then turn back. She just had no mobility.

And so, I'm at the door when service ended. And those of you that have been with us would remember this. I always rushed to the door, so you couldn't get out without me saying hi to you or shaking your hand unless you had to really work hard to avoid me. So I'm there shaking people's hands, and she comes up with her daughter, and she turns to me and says, "Pastor, I've been listening. You're having those healing services Sunday night. You have one tonight, right?" I said, "We do." She says, "I'm coming." I said, "Good." She said, "You know what?" I said, "What?" She said, "I'm going to be healed." I said, "Okay." And she shuffled out the door.

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She came that night, came up in the prayer line. Hands were laid on her, and that walking stick went flying one way. She was instantly healed in front of everyone. Complete mobility. It was amazing.

So, the next Sunday morning, I still remember it clearly because we had a guest speaker in. And before the guest speaker was turned loose, we said, "Look, we want you to come up and tell your story." So, she's going to come up. There were steps to the platform. She's going to come up. The usher's just being kind to help her. She bats his arm away and says, "People have been helping me long enough." She marches up and prances around the platform back and forth, completely well, and shares her story. It was amazing.

But you know, her faith was active. She was declaring, "I'm coming tonight. I will be healed." The Bible says, "We have believed; therefore, we have spoken." And she did it. She came. Her faith had action attached to it.

If you read through the Gospels, it's interesting, not exclusively, but almost in every case, there are a few isolated cases where this didn't happen. But almost in every case where someone was healed, individuals or crowds, they came to Jesus. Just a few select times did Jesus maybe seek someone out or find the individual. Almost always, the people initiated it, and they came. They came.

The centurion's faith was active. Faith that doesn't act really isn't faith at all.

Third thing: His faith did not depend on good works or personal merit. The elders of the Jews, when they came, said, "Look, this guy deserves this. You should do this for him. He loves our nation, and he's built us a synagogue. His love for our nation has made him unpopular among some of his own people. And he's put his money where his mouth is. He's actually built us a synagogue. Jesus, he deserves this." But the guy himself said two times, "I'm not worthy." He did not approach Jesus. He did not make a request of Jesus based on his good works or his personal merit. It wasn't in the equation at all with him.

Though the Jews said, all right, you should do it. He should get it based on these good things he's done. But he said, "Look, I'm not worthy. I'm not doing this based on anything that I've done, anything that I've sacrificed. Listen, Jesus, this is going to be based on Your goodness."

The Bible says, by faith . . .

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Ephesians 2:8–9. Most of us know that.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

By grace through faith, not of works.

By grace through faith, not of personal merit. By grace through faith, not based on anything that you've done or that I have done.

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And that word “saved” by grace, you’re saved through faith. It’s the Greek word Sozo. It’s the same word translated, healed, made well, and made whole throughout the New Testament in connection with people being physically healed by God. We wouldn’t do damage to that verse in any way if we said, by grace are you healed through faith and that not of works. It is the gift of God lest anyone should boast.

I have a little article. I’ve had it for years and years. It was a large baking company. And they came up with this new cake mix. And they thought it was going to be their best seller. And no one would buy it. Interesting little article. The only thing you had to add was water. They think, “This is so convenient. Everyone’s going to love it. Our name is sort of the standard in the industry.”

And so, they could afford it. They paid to have a study done. “Why have people not bought this product? We need to know.” And the results of the study was that people don’t trust something that they don’t have a part to play in it.

And so they changed the recipe that you had to add one egg. And the boxes flew off the shelves. People said, “Okay, if we have to do something, then we’ll trust it.”

And you know we sometimes come to God that way. It’s like, “I come, and I got this prayer, and I feel really good about it because I’ve spent a lot of time reading my Bible this week,” or, “I’ve really got confidence because I haven’t kicked the dog or yelled at my wife once this week,” or, “I’ve given sacrificially in the offering,” or whatever it might be. Just forget all that. Those things are good. “I’ve got unbroken church attendance.” That’s wonderful, but it’s not going to get your prayers answered. “I spent extra time praying.” That’s good, but it’s not going to get your prayers answered. God’s not obligated based on our good works or our personal merit. It’s by grace, through faith, plus zero.

All right. The fourth thing: The word of Jesus was the only evidence his faith required. I love it. He said to Jesus, “Just say the word. It’s all I need, just Your word. I don’t need any other evidence.”

Janet and I were in Australia years and years ago. And this is prior to the existence of mobile phones, iPads. There was none of that stuff. And when we traveled, in fact, still to this day, I’ll carry the passports. And so I’ve got her passport and my passport. And she has to leave three days earlier than me. I don’t recall why. But I’ve got the passports. I’ve got her boarding pass. There’s no such thing as an electronic boarding pass. It’s a paper ticket. And so, she’s getting either in the taxi or somebody’s taking her there. And I said, “Babe, you got your Bible?” She said, “Yes, it’s in my bag.” I said, “Okay, I put your passport. and I put your boarding pass in the Bible. It’s in your bag.” She said, “Okay.” She gave me a kiss, and off she went. And I watched her. She didn’t check. It’s a 45-minute ride to the airport, and if I didn’t put it in there, she’s going to miss her flight. And she’s got to drive all the way back.

And I asked her when I got home days later, I said, “Hey, when did you check in your Bible?” She says, “Well, not till I got up to the window, and I needed to check my bag, and the lady asked for my passport and said, ‘Oh, yes, I’ve got it here.’” She says she’s never even thought about it. Apparently, my wife has great faith in my word. “Just say the word.”

Now, that may seem oversimplified, but that’s what great faith in God is, that we just take Him at His word, and we act like it’s so.

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No other evidence other than the word. Janet didn't go, "Let me check. I've got to make sure." She just accepted my word.

All right. Let's move from this centurion with great faith to one that I will call "The Shipwrecked Centurion." The story is found in Acts chapter 27. And Paul is under arrest. He's been put into the custody of a Roman centurion and some soldiers because he's appealed to Caesar. So he's on his way to Rome. And they're on a ship, and they get into a horrendous storm. For two weeks, they don't see the sun or the moon, or the stars. All hope that they should be saved was given up. They're bobbing around like a cork in a stormy sea of blackness.

And then, suddenly, Paul comes out and takes charge. And he says, "Look, an angel stood by me tonight. And God showed me that He's granting me my life and the lives of all those that sail with me, but we're going to run aground on a certain island." And from that point on, that moment, the centurion did everything that Paul said. He took Paul's word as "gospel," if you would.

It's really interesting if you read it. Just anything that Paul said, the centurion did it. Why? Well, Paul had told him to do something earlier, and he didn't do it. And he realized, "Wait a minute, this man hears from God. We never would've been in the storm if I'd listened to him in the first place." And the lesson that I want to draw out of the story is this; we must be sensitive to and listen for the Holy Spirit's promptings.

We back up two weeks in the scenario that I just relayed to you, Acts 27:9–15. It says,

⁹ Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, ¹⁰ saying, "Men, I perceive . . .

Everyone say, "I perceive."

¹⁰ saying, "Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives." ¹¹ Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. ¹² And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there.

¹³ When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. ¹⁴ But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. ¹⁵ So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive.

And then they were in the terrible storm for weeks from that point.

Now, on one side, Paul says, "I perceive." He has an inward perception. That was from the Holy Spirit. There was nothing outward to substantiate it. So we have Paul's perception versus the experts, the majority, and the circumstances. The centurion was more persuaded by that which was spoken by the helmsman, all right, that means the skipper. He knows the waters of that region. He knows the winds. He knows the seasons. Certainly, he's right. He's the expert. And then it says he was also persuaded by what the owner of the ship had to say. The owner, this is what he does for a living. He's not willing to incur the loss of his ship and the loss of his cargo. This guy's an expert.

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So, we've got the experts saying, "We need to go," and then it says, "The majority advised." And we all know the majority's always right. If everybody's saying it, it has to be right, doesn't it? If the media says it, it has to be right, doesn't it?

So, we've got the experts, we've got the majority, and then the circumstances all lined up. The south wind began to blow softly. They thought, "We've obtained our desire. This is the exact wind we needed to sail." So there's this soft wind blowing in the right direction.

So you've got the experts, the majority, and the doors have all opened, and the stars have aligned. On the other side, you got, "No, I got an inward perception." "You an expert?" "No." "Anybody agree with you?" "No." "Are the circumstances lined up?" "No, but I have an inward perception." Who was right? Paul and his Holy Spirit perception, or the experts, majority, and circumstances? Paul was the one that was right.

And here's the point. Every believer has the ability to be led by the Holy Spirit like this. That inward sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's promptings can and must be developed. Otherwise, we will end up in the middle of many storms that we would otherwise completely avoid.

Some here today, and this is not a word from God, but just by virtue of how many people are here, there are some people here right now, you're in the middle of a terrible storm. It could've been avoided. We need to learn to listen to that inward perception.

There are a lot of stories I could use to illustrate it, but one that I tend to come back to all the time. My boys had bunk beds that were in my room when I was a kid. And they were bugging me and said, "Dad, we want a bed on each side of the room. Please take the bunk beds apart." And I said, "I'll do it. I'll do it," and then I didn't do it. And I said, "I'll do it," and I didn't get around to it.

And I'm actually leaving to go to an appointment I have at the church, and I'm just going to make it on time. And I start walking down the hallway, and something stopped me, just something inside. And I literally, I stopped, I said, "Holy Spirit, could that be You? And I felt like something saying, "Go do the bunk beds now." It made no sense to me at all. And I thought, I just kind of rationalized. I said, "No, I got to keep my word. I'm going to be late to an appointment." And so I walk down the hallway and stopped again, just I'm bothered. I said, "Really? I'm going to be late?" And I said, "No, I'll do it when I get home." I walk, put my hand on the doorknob, that inward thing is there." I go. "All right." So I got my toolbox and took the beds down.

And when I got home that afternoon, the boys hadn't been in there. I kept it a surprise. I opened up the door and said, "Look, boys," and "Oh," and Harrison goes, "Which one's mine?" Now Spencer was probably three at the time, maybe four, but I think he was three, Harrison's just a couple years older. And I go, "That one's yours, Harrison." He sits on it, and the whole thing collapses.

Now, my dad used to kind of overbuild things when he would do something. And I don't know. For whatever reason, he got rid of the slats in that upper bunk when I was a kid. And I don't know where he found it, but he got a piece of plywood that was at least an inch thick. I didn't even think they made plywood that thick. It was just a solid piece of plywood. It was so heavy. I could barely manhandle the thing and move it. And so he had that instead of the slats. And then there was the box springs, and there was the mattress.

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And every night when the boys, we'd pray, give them a kiss, and Spencer would go down in his bed, and then Harrison would climb up the ladder and get in his bed. What would've happened? Spencer would've, my little three-year-old boy, gone down in that bottom bunk. Harrison would've climbed up, he would've got on that, and the entire thing would've collapsed and fallen on my little boy seriously, if not permanently injuring him. And I just went, "Holy Spirit, thank You for that inward perception."

The Bible says the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit. But sometimes in our lives and in our noisy world, we've got so much noise going on all the time. We're always forever on our devices looking at this, scrolling through that. And we don't take time to get quiet and become familiar with the Holy Spirit's voice and with His promptings. I'm telling you, God wants to talk to every one of His children that way. That is not out of the normal. That is the normal way that God will guide His children.

All right. Let's move to the third centurion, and I call him the arresting centurion. In Acts 22, we find a story. Paul has been seized by an angry mob in the temple at Jerusalem. They drag him outside, and they are beating the tar out of him. Their intent was to kill him.

Meanwhile, the Roman garrison commander gets wind of it, and he rushes over with soldiers, and they take Paul away from the mob. And he has Paul put in chains and orders him to be tortured, to be scourged, literally with a whip with pieces of bone and metal on it to tear your flesh off. Most people never live through a Roman scourging. But he orders him to be scourged to find out the truth. So, we're going to torture you to find out why the mob is rioting and what it is you did. And we pick the story up at that point. Acts 22:25–29,

²⁵ And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?"

²⁶ When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman."

²⁷ Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes."

²⁸ The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship."

And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen."

²⁹ Then immediately those who were about to examine him . . .

(meaning those who were about to torture him)

. . . withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

Against Roman law, you couldn't bind a Roman. You couldn't jail a Roman without a proper trial. So, this guy realizes he's potentially in trouble because he's done this to a Roman. Here's my point. Paul didn't hesitate to exercise his rights as a Roman citizen, and it did not conflict with his Christianity. He didn't hesitate to exercise his rights as a citizen, and it didn't conflict with his Christianity. In fact, not just here in this story, he did the same thing in Acts chapter 16. And it's

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worth reading. It talks a lot about it. And he was bold with the leaders of a city because he was a Roman citizen, and they had violated the law.

Later on in Romans 25, he appeals to the highest court in the land, and it's granted him using his rights as a citizen.

Now, some have taken the words of Jesus about turning the other cheek to an unbiblical extreme. Jesus was talking about being insulted. In fact, interesting, if you look in John chapter 16, when Jesus is there on trial, an officer struck Jesus with the palm of his hand because of the way Jesus spoke to the high priest. Did Jesus turn the other cheek? No, He did not. He challenged the man and set him straight. It's in your Bible. The book of John chapter 18.

Now, listen, it's one thing if you're being insulted or imposed upon in a small way. It's entirely different if you or your family are being threatened with bodily harm, or if your property is being unjustly and illegally seized, or if the governing authorities are seeking to muzzle the gospel. That's an entirely different situation altogether.

Our property was illegally and unjustly seized. We'd worked for two years, put the deal together, got different owners to sell it. We consolidated the property, worked for another year on plans. Three days after we turned the plans in to be able to build, and the underlying zoning allowed a church, the city's redevelopment agency locked us out of our property. And they completely twisted the law of eminent domain that says, if a highway has to come through or a reservoir needs to be built, well, then you're forced to sell your property at an honest rate. But they were using it because a big box retailer wanted our property now that we've done all the work and put it together. And they were going to get some benefit from that.

So they locked us out of our property, and we protested. We got attorneys. We said, "You can't do that." And I remember we had a meeting with the representatives from this big box retailer, and the guy said, "Look, you're not acting like Christians. Christians are not supposed to protest or make their voices known. You're not supposed to push back at all. You need to be a good citizen. You just need to play dead, roll over and do whatever the governing authorities tell you to do. You're supposed to be obedient to the governing authorities. You're not acting like Christians. We strongly disagreed. It ended up in federal court, where we won the case handily.

Now, something I've actually never shared before. But sometime back, a man from another part of the world sent a significant offering to the broadcast outreach of the church. And it was the single largest offering that the television outreach had ever received. And so, I told them, I said, "Look, I'd like to just say thank you to the guy." And they said, "Well, Pastor, he's told us he wants to remain anonymous. We don't think that would be possible." I said, "We'll just see. I don't have to know his name. I just feel like I'm supposed to say thank you to the guy."

So finally, he agreed, gets on the phone, he says, "I'm not telling you my name." He said, "This is just a matter of me being obedient to Jesus, and if there's any thanks that needs to be given, don't give it to me. You give it to Jesus. He's the one that gets all the thanks and all the glory." I said, "Okay. Fair enough." He said, "But I can tell you this." He said, "I bought a large tract of land (in his country)." And he gave a big portion of it to a church. The church needed property, they needed to build, and it was zoned like our property. It was zoned, it allowed a church, but some of the city council members in the city said, "We don't want a church here." He said, "So, the church I gave the property to, they didn't push back at all. They said, 'Okay, we're going to be good citizens, and we know we have to do what you say.'" He said they never pushed back.

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They never protested at all. They sold the property. They went to a much smaller site in a much less convenient location, where it would curtail their outreach.

And he said, "I was so frustrated. I felt like God had set the whole thing up just so the church could have this prime piece of property. But they said, 'No, we can't go against what these governing officials have said,' even though it was legal for them to have a church there." He said, "I was so frustrated, and then I heard your story that your land was zoned for a church, and they tried to take it away from you, and you fought, and you won." He said, "I will tell you this. Jesus told me to tell you this is His way to say thank you to you for fighting. You did the right thing."

Now, I know that I just plowed some people's field crossways. Too bad. If I'm rubbing the cat's fur the wrong way, let the cat turn around. What I said is true.

Now, in our dealings with the governing authorities, we need to be led by the Holy Spirit, certainly, but within that context of being Spirit-led, it is not contrary to our Christianity to use the rights that we have as citizens and to stand for those rights. The apostle Paul did it time and time again. And so, unless the Spirit is leading you to do something else, it's not a conflict to your Christianity. It may be advantageous for you to exercise your rights as citizens.

All right, let me move on, if I might, to our fourth centurion. This is the centurion at the cross. I just want to read one verse, Matthew 27:54 KJV. It says,

⁵⁴ Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

They were watching Jesus. Now, it certainly means they were guarding Him, keeping, watching Him, but it also just means they were watching Jesus. They watched Him. They saw the earthquake. The sky turned dark. It says they watched, and they saw the things that were done.

They watched Him suffer and die. They observed the supernatural events, but they also watched more than that. The centurion watched how Jesus treated His enemies. He's dying on the cross. And the very people that crucified Him and brutalized Him, the centurion hears Jesus say, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." He watched Jesus embrace one of the thieves on the cross, who minutes before was hurling accusations and insults at Jesus. But the man has a change of heart, and he says, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Jesus said, "Today, I say to you, you'll be with Me in paradise." He watched Jesus interact with His enemies. He saw Him forgive the ones that had perpetrated evil against Him. He watched how Jesus treated His family.

There as He is hanging on the cross, there's John and His mother. He says, "Mother, behold your son. Son, this is your mother." From that day, Jesus' mother, Mary, lived in the house of John.

The centurion had to be thinking, "Man, this Guy is dying. This is the cruelest way we know how to kill people, and He's thinking about His family. He's not thinking about Himself." He watched and saw the impact that Jesus had on others, people that he knew, like the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. He knew Pilate was a cruel man who had crucified hundreds before this, with no conscience about it whatsoever. And now he watches Pilate as he's challenging the Jews about Jesus, calling Jesus a just man, trying to get Him released, and he does something profound.

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Pilate publicly washes his hands and says in front of everyone, "I've got nothing to do with the blood of this holy Man." Pilate is disturbed. He's shaken, and the centurion has never seen such a thing before.

So seeing all of these things, taking it all in, weighing it out, the centurion reaches this conclusion, Jesus was the Son of God.

People are watching and weighing things out about us all the time. Did you know that? The Bible says we're living epistles read and known of all men. People are watching how we treat our enemies, those that malign us, those that speak against us. People are watching and weighing out how does our Christianity really work in that arena. People are watching how we treat our families, how we treat our kids, our spouses, our friends. They're watching the effect that we have on others. They're watching all the time. And we want them to come to the conclusion that Jesus is the Son of God. All these things wouldn't be happening unless there was something real going on here.

I was invited to speak once for a guy. He's the leading pastor in his city, very well known. And he picks me up at the airport. We get to the hotel, and my room's not ready. And this pastor went off on the poor girl behind the counter in the hotel. He said, do you know who I am? Do you know how many people we have stay in this hotel? What do you mean the room's not ready? We booked this room weeks ago. What are you talking about? And you just watch this poor girl wilt. And he was angry, and he was rude to her, bossy to her.

And I said, "Look, I don't mind waiting. You just go take off. We'll see you this evening. I'll just sit in the lobby for an hour or so until . . . I can read a little bit till my room's ready. He said, "Okay." And he storms off. As soon as he got out the door, immediately I went back to that poor girl. I said, "I am so sorry. He never should have spoken to you like that. It's so unfair. It was so unkind. I think maybe he's had a bad day. I don't know, but please don't hold it against him." I said, "I'm just really, really sorry." And she thanked me for it.

She knew he was a pastor, so did all the other people standing behind the desk looking at him. Every one of them knew who he was.

People are watching. They're watching us all the time. And that is going to be enough to bring some people to Christ. When God sees fit, He may throw a sign or a wonder in there somewhere for some people. The centurion saw that the sky turned dark and the earthquake and all that. Now, you're not the one that determines if you need a sign, God's the one that determines that.

Somebody said, "Well, I'm not going to believe if you don't show me a sign." You are probably not going to get one, my friend. But God, when He deems it necessary, He'll do it.

I've got some dear friends, wonderful Christians, really involved in their church. And some friends of theirs had gotten saved and shared the gospel with them, a real clear gospel message. And they just said, "Look, we're not into that, thanks, but no thanks."

And they went on a trip to Mexico. And they're going to be staying, I think they had, like, a Volkswagen bus, and they went to this sort of remote area, like a camping place. And they made their camp. And one of them made the mistake of going swimming in the sea and had the keys in their pocket. And the keys came out when they were swimming in the ocean.

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And so, they got back to the camp and, “Oh my gosh, I’ve lost the keys.” And they got in a horrific fight. Now, I know you cannot imagine you as a husband or wife getting angry and being in a fight over something like that. But they got in a fight. Just yelling at each other. “How stupid can you be?” “Well, I didn’t think about it. It’s not my fault.” “Yes, it is your fault. We’re stuck down here now in Mexico, and we can’t even drive the flipping van.”

Anyway, he leaves in a huff, goes down the beach one way. She goes down the other way. He walks like a couple miles, there’s this jetty there, and inland, there’s a little village and a small church there. He goes in the church. He’s in there. There are a few people in there. And he notices there they got Jesus on a cross in there. But the statue was cracked at both shoulders, and His hands are down at His sides.

And he thought, “How weird?” And so, he asked the people in church and says, “What’s up with your Jesus? Why isn’t He like this? Why is He?” They said, “Well, a couple years ago, there was a hurricane, and it was terrible. We thought it was going to totally demolish our village. And the whole village, we gathered in the church, and we prayed and asked Jesus to help us.” They said, “Suddenly, both of His shoulders on the statue cracked. And His arms went like that.” They said, “The moment His arms went down, the storm hushed.”

He said, “Really?” They said, “Really?” It struck him so hard. He went out on that little jetty and sat down, and he said, “You know what? I believe this.” And he accepted Christ sitting on the jetty. He said, “I got to tell my wife.” So, he goes walking back to the beach, and he sees a figure in the distance. It turns out his wife is walking toward him. They meet. He says, “Baby, I got to tell you something.” She said, “Me first.” She holds up the car keys. He said, “Okay, you first.” She said, “I was walking down the beach, I was so mad. And I was thinking about what our friends told us about Jesus.” And she said, “I prayed.” I said, “God, if this stuff about Jesus is true, help me find the car keys.” She said, “Just then, this little wave came up and threw the keys at my feet.” She said, “I have to tell you, I’ve become a Christian. I accepted Jesus.” He said, “Me too.”

Now God can do that. And sometimes, He chooses to do things like that.

And that brings us to our final centurion. I call him the centurion who prayed. Acts 10:1–6,

¹ There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, ² a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always.

³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!”

⁴ And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?”

So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. ⁵ Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea. He will tell you what you must do.”

Everyone say, “must do.”

“Peter is going to tell you what you must do.” And you know the story. Meanwhile, Peter’s on the roof of this guy’s house. He’s staying out by the sea, and he’s having a vision, God is showing

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him that the Gentiles can be part of the Church. And then the Holy Spirit whispers to him and says, “There are three men outside,” says, “Go with them. Don’t doubt anything.” They’ve come from Cornelius’ household. The centurion, he goes with them. He gets there, preaches the gospel, the whole house, all of his family, all of his friends, get saved, gets filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking in other tongues, marvelous gathering.

And then, in Acts chapter 11, Peter’s called on the carpet by the Jewish Christians. They said, “Hey, we heard you went into the house of Gentiles. We don’t do that. That’s wrong.” So Peter relays the whole story to them, everything that happened, and then he says this. Acts 11:13, speaking of the centurion.

¹³ And he told us how he had seen an angel standing in his house, who said to him, ‘Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, ¹⁴ who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved.’

“Call for Peter. He’ll tell you words whereby you and all your household will be saved.” All right, here’s the lesson. They have to hear words to be saved. This Roman centurion, Cornelius, was not saved yet. The angel said, “This is what you must do. Call for Peter. He’ll tell you words. He’s going to preach the gospel to you, and by hearing that gospel and embracing it, you’re going to be saved.” So we’ve got Cornelius. He fears God with all of his household. This guy has a genuine reverence for God, and he’s taught his family to reverence God as well, but he’s not saved. He gave alms generously to the poor. He was a generous man. He gave to the poor. That’s high on God’s priority list, but he was not saved. He prayed to God always. In fact, his giving and his prayers were remembered by God, but he was not saved. He had a supernatural visitation from an angel, the real deal, but he was not saved.

And there are people in our personal worlds, they genuinely reverence God. They may give generously to their church or to the poor. They may pray. They may have even had a visitation, but they’re not saved. People need to hear words. The Bible says God has chosen through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe. Now, if it was me, I would have leaned more heavily on the signs and wonders. But God has chosen, through the foolishness of preaching, the message preached to save those who believe.

And I bet you know someone in your life that all those categories, you can tick every one of those boxes, and they may even go to church regularly, but going to church that doesn’t make you a Christian. You have to embrace the gospel. You have to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scripture says that the whole human race is separated from God because of sin. We’ve all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

In fact, the book of Romans says the whole world stands guilty before God. And God, being a God of justice, He must judge our sin, but He’s also a God of love. So He didn’t leave us in our sin. When we couldn’t fix it on our own, He reached down to us. He sent His own Son, the Son of God, who dwelt with the Father in eternity past, literally took upon Himself flesh, was born of a virgin, and lived a sinless life. He healed the sick. He raised the dead. He talked about God as a loving Father. No one had ever heard words like that before, and they hung on every word. And then Jesus was taken by wicked, cruel, jealous hands, put through a mock trial, beaten beyond recognition, and crucified. And there, as He hung on that cross, the sky turned dark, showing that things were turning dark for Jesus because, at that moment, He became our substitute.

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The sin of the world was laid on Jesus. It was God's plan. He took the penalty, the righteous judgment against everything Bayless did wrong, thought wrong, went wrong, and He laid the entire guilt of that on the innocent, pure, perfect Son of God. And He took all of your sins, the weight of them, the guilt of them, and the sin of the whole world, laid it on Jesus, and He became our substitute. And He died under the weight of our sins.

After three days and three nights, the claims of God's eternal justice having been satisfied, Jesus was raised from the dead. And the Bible says if you'll believe that and if you'll confess Him as Lord, and that's not just some magic wand you wave, that's not just some magic Christian buzzword. Lord means boss. It means I die to my rights of independent living, and Jesus, I'm going Your way. I submit myself to You, spirit, soul, and body. I'm all in. And when a person does that, God brings them into a relationship, makes them family. It's called salvation. It's so radical, so life-changing. The apostle Paul said that we become new creations. Literally, God makes us new on the inside, invades our spirit, and cleans us inwardly. Jesus called it being born again.

You can be religious. You can pray. You can give. You can have a supernatural encounter of some kind, but it will not save you. You must give your heart to Jesus. You must bow your heart to Him and call Him Lord.

I don't think it's a coincidence that we're together today, out on the plaza, in this auditorium. If you've never done that, I want to give you the opportunity to do it. And in just a moment, I want every head up, every eye open, everybody looking around, okay? Jesus died not in a corner somewhere. He didn't die on some altar between two candles. He died out in the highways and byways of humanity: public ridicule, public shame for us. The least I can do is stand up for Him.

In a moment, I'm going to count to three. Not yet. I'll count to three. When I do, if you know you need to give your life to Jesus, I'm going to ask you to stand without shame, without hesitation. And then I'll have everyone stand with you, and we'll pray a prayer together.

You know, the Bible talks about the fear of man. It says the fear of man brings a snare, meaning that if I've got my peace in your head, I'm going to live a very restricted life. It snares me. It ties me up. I'll never truly live my life from my heart like I should as long as I'm afraid of what you think of me, as long as I'm afraid of how you're going to interpret what I say and what I do. And so standing up, I think it's just a way to break the chains of the fear of man. In a sense, you'll be saying, God, if the whole world wants to watch right now, I don't care. Let them watch. I care more about what You think than anyone else. I think it'll help you, and I believe it will honor God.

Now, if you're a prodigal son or a prodigal daughter, you've had a genuine encounter with Jesus, but you've been living in that far country, and you know your life is so inconsistent with the gospel right now that if Jesus returned, you'd be ashamed. I got good news for you. He's not mad at you. Prodigal son, it's time for you to come home. Prodigal daughter, it's time for you to come home. It's time for you to jump, not dip your toes in the water. It's time for you to jump in, all in for Jesus, without shame.

I'm just going to count to three. One, out on the plaza, in here, you want in on this prayer. You're that backslider that needs to come home. Maybe the first time you've ever accepted Christ or you just know in your heart of hearts the Lord's whispering to you, stand. Two. It's your moment, friend. All over the auditorium, outside. Three. Stand your feet if you want in on the prayer. Just stand up.

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God bless you. I love it. Courage. Awesome. Awesome. Back there. All in the back, over here. It's awesome. Yes. Just remain standing, if you would—a bunch of people here. God bless you. Outside as well. Listen, a lot of people are standing up here. I got to tell you, we may have never had a conversation, but I know two things about you for sure. For sure, I know this. Number one, I know you have faith. We talked about faith being expressed by action. You never would have stood up if you didn't have faith. The fact that you stood demonstrates your faith. The Bible says, "Without faith, it's impossible to please God." God is pleased.

Second thing, I know for sure you have courage. Some people are going, "He thinks he's going to get me to stand up; he's crazy," but you did it. You have courage. You do. Why don't we stand up with them? Okay? Stand up with them. We're going to pray. Maybe put a hand on your heart. I can give you some words to pray. But what God's interested in is that sincere heart you put behind them. So tie your heart around these words. Tie your heart tightly around these words, and let's speak them to God. Just pray with me and say,

Oh God, I come to You. With all of my heart, I believe that Jesus is the Son of God. I believe He died on the cross to take away all my sin. Jesus, thank You for loving me so much that You would die in my place. I put my trust in You. Oh, risen Savior, come into my life. I confess You as my Lord. And from this moment forward, wherever You lead me, I will go. It's in Your name, I pray. Amen. Amen. Awesome.

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