

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us today is found in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew the eighth chapter beginning at the first verse, and we read in Jesus' name:

When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. ² And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." ³ Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. ⁴ And Jesus said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." ⁵ Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, ⁶ saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented." ⁷ And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." ⁸ The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not

worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ "For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." ¹⁰ When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel! ¹¹ "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² "But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." ¹³ Then Jesus said to the centurion, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." And his servant was healed that same hour.

Heavenly Father, these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

If you had cancer and a doctor told you that you would be fine without running a single test or even seeing you in his office, would you believe him? If your child went away to war and you never got a letter or phone call, would you rest easy at night knowing everything were fine? If on your wedding day was the last time you heard your spouse say the words “I love you” and you just now celebrated your 40th wedding anniversary, would you believe it to still be true?

Faith has always been a very interesting concept to me. I know recently we talked about it in Bible Study... how would you define faith? It's believing but more. It just is. You know it when you see it. In the previous examples, the doctor, the child, and the spouse, how much faith do you have in them? Would you have faith that your doctor were right, though performing no tests? Would you have faith that your child were fine though no phone call ever came through? Would you believe the love is still there though you have not heard the words in quite some time?

Both of the men in our text for today indeed had faith... but what about you? Do you have faith in Jesus Christ? Do you have faith that when I stand before you and forgive your sins in the stead of Jesus that your sins are forgiven? Do you have faith that the words I speak are not lies? And if so, how do you know? How do you know you have faith? And if you do have faith, what do you have faith in?

Dear friends in Christ, today as we ponder the words of Christ let us ponder our faith. May we find that we have faith like the leper... may we find that we have faith like the centurion... may we find that we have, as Jesus terms is, ***such great faith.***

Pastor, of course I believe, of course I have faith, I'm at church and listening to you, so I must have faith. However, we need to remember many things about Jesus ministry before we just assume that we have faith. We need to remember that many people who went to “church” with and without Jesus and yet most of them did not have faith. We are told

that Jesus had many disciples who “fell away” from Him because some of His teachings were too difficult to handle... and isn't that true about us today also?

Of course not, we're in the ELS, we believe and follow the Bible perfectly. Okay, well how many of you have broken the first commandment, to have no other gods? How many of you have broken the fourth commandment, to honor your father and mother? How many of you have broken the seventh commandment, to not steal? How many of you have broken the eighth commandment, to not lie? But I thought you believed and followed the Bible perfectly... And you go to church and you say that you believe, but you don't keep the commandments? Does that sound like someone of “such great faith” to you?

Also, during Jesus ministry there were many who in addition to going to church actually listened while they were there. But we know that there are a great number of people who left Jesus because of the things that He was saying.

Claiming to be God's Son drove away a good number of people. Claiming to forgive sins really soured some people to Him. Claiming that He came from heaven caused most of His home village to disown Him.

And what about you? You come to church and you listen to God's Word... but do you take it to heart? When God's Word says that we should hate sin, do we? When God's Word says that we should not speak ill of others, do we? When our catechisms, the correct explanation of God's Word, tell us that we are to not dishonor or anger those in authority but honor, serve, and obey them and give them love and respect, do we?

And what does Jesus say about those who do not take His word to heart and who do not hold to His word? Matthew chapter 8 verse 12, “But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” When we are not found to be faithful, this is our end result. When we are not faithful to our God and to His word, our end result is hell. Not a slap on the wrist, not a

time-out, not a stern talking to... it is hell. When we do not have faith we will end up in hell. Period. There is no nice way to put this. There is no sugar-coating this message. If we do not heed God's word and trust and believe in it, we will wind up in hell.

But I have faith... faith in what? In yourself? In your money? In your stuff? In your friends and family? What do you have faith in?

Two men, in our text, approached Jesus and they had nothing that they were willing to cling to, except Christ. The leper, a societal outcast had nothing, and all he could do was approach Jesus and beg him, "If you are willing..." Jesus, if you are willing you can make me clean. Notice he did not approach Jesus with an explanation of how good he had been, he did not approach Jesus with how often he heard random people talk, he did not approach Jesus with his great "church attendance;" no, he approached Jesus with nothing... nothing but faith that Jesus would have mercy upon him and help him.

So too the centurion, though he was great among the people, he approached Jesus with nothing. Though others had told Jesus how worthy and upright this centurion was, for he had built a synagogue, the centurion came to Jesus with nothing... except faith. He came to Jesus with faith in his heart knowing that if Jesus just spoke a word, then all would be well.

Both of these men came before Jesus just as you and I ought to come before Jesus... with nothing. We come before Christ and we can bring nothing of ourselves, because of ourselves we are sinners and we would bring the most vile and filthy rags to Him. So we come before Him with nothing... begging Him to have mercy upon us, and He does. He has mercy upon us, not because of how great and awesome we are, no He has mercy upon us because of how loving and gracious He is.

Jesus Christ came into this world to live a perfect life and to die an innocent death for you. He came into this world to suffer the pain of rejection, abandonment, abuse, mocking, ridicule, and pain indescribable for you. Jesus

came into this world to assure that you have heaven waiting.

And it is through faith, faith that Jesus Christ has lived and died for us, faith that because of Jesus we are forgiven all of our wrongs, faith that He has done everything and I can do nothing for my salvation.

However, there is one thing that you can do to help... you can continue to hear the word of God. Though both the leper and centurion had faith, it had to come from somewhere... and that somewhere is just as Paul tells us (10:17), "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Both of these men knew God's word and they knew that a Savior, a Messiah, was to come... and they believed that Jesus was that Messiah. Jesus granted their requests because they came from faith filled hearts. Hearts that heard the word of God and kept it. In fact of the centurion Jesus says, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel." This is a man who had received his faith as a gift, from God, and continued to strengthen that faith, through the

hearing and reading of God's word, and he showed his faith by trusting solely in Jesus Christ... and this is the great honor that we have.

We can come and hear about Jesus Christ, God's Son, and we can increase our faith. We can make that faith all the stronger when we take heed of God's Word, and of His sacraments. Just as Johann Gerhard said about this text, "Not only did [Jesus] give up His life-giving flesh on the cross for the life of the world, but He also gives the same flesh to eat in the holy Lord's Supper. He thus also touches us with the same flesh in order that we may have cleansing from sin, and may have life... For with every anxiety and tribulation which He allows to be dispatched to His own, it is with the intention that they submit their heart to Him and immerse themselves in His will."

Dear friends in Christ, faith can be a very intriguing thing But thanks be to God that He has given us our faith through His Word, so that like the leper and the centurion we too might

believe on Jesus Christ for the healing that we need.

Thanks be to God that He has given me my faith. Thanks be to God that He has given me His word to strengthen the faith that He has given to me. And thanks be to God that He has allowed me, a lowly sinner, to have **such great faith.**

Thanks be to God. Amen.