



- Introduction – Mary’s complete reliance as she jumps from high places into my arms
  - Sometimes, she jumps before I even know she is coming.
  - So far, I have not let her fall, but she is getting big enough now that she is about to break my back.
  - Nonetheless, Mary’s complete reliance as she sails through the air is a good picture of effective faith in Christ.
  
- The Big Idea: Effective faith requires radical reliance upon Jesus Christ.
  - It seeks those who will leap into the arms of our loving God with all the faith of a small girl jumping into the arms of her father.
  
- Read Luke 7:1-16
- Pray

The key to understanding this passage is the extraordinary statement Jesus makes in verse nine where He commends the Centurion’s faith, saying, *“I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.”* You know, of all the encouragement that Jesus gives to anyone in all of Scripture—of all the kind words He offers to anyone—few surpass His approval of this Centurion’s faith.

Listen: Whenever we hear Jesus offering encouragement as favorable as this, we ought to pay very careful attention, and we ought to pay attention by asking at least two crucial questions. First, we ought to ask what Jesus is commending. In this case it is the Centurion’s faith. Second, we are blessed to ask, “Why does He give such approbation?” so that we might grow in that same attribute. In this case, we ought to ask, “What is it about this Centurion’s faith that was so commendable?” so that we might similarly please God with a similar faith. And in

this text, I think we see at least three aspects of this Centurion's faith that I think God wants us to emulate, the first of which is this:

1.) We can rely upon the radical righteousness of Christ.

Since we find ourselves in the midst of a monumental presidential campaign, I thought I would do a presidential poll this morning. But don't worry; I'm not going to ask you who you plan to vote for. Rather, I want to ask you which two or three American presidents in all of history you think revealed the *least* amount of personal integrity. Whom would you name? I imagine that we could have a rather lively debate on this subject, and it might even get ugly. However, we would surely agree that whichever presidents won this poll would not be considered some of our nation's greatest—not even close.

What is the point? Well, this illustration about presidential success is offered to emphasize a simple principle that I think we all already know, and that is this: Unrighteousness is unreliable. We need not look far to see the power of this statement. In fact, just this week, we have seen this truth illustrated in the lamentable collapse of so many of our nation's primary financial institutions, such as Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Lehman Brothers, and AIG. Now, while there are many fingers being pointed around in an effort to shirk responsibility and cast blame, what is patently obvious is that at the very root of this mess is unrighteousness, mostly in the form of human greed and deception.

With that in mind, let me ask you, where *are* you placing your trust this morning? Is your hope for this life tied up in something where unrighteousness abounds? Is your hope in your 401k? We have seen this week how quickly the unrighteous greed of people we don't even know can bring that down. Is your hope in the government and politics? Now, while there are clearly exceptions, I think we can all agree that, by and large, unrighteousness has become more of a norm in politics than an exception. Would we, then, place our hope in government? If not there, then is your hope in your own goodness? If it is, please recall Romans 3:23, which assures us that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*," and hear Proverbs 28:26, which warns, "*He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.*"

Where is our hope? Many indulge in drugs and alcohol hoping to find what they call a "good time," or they waste their lives in pursuit of the short-lived thrills of lust or sex outside of marriage. In the end, however, these choices inevitably find the unholy destruction and despair that unrighteousness inevitably brings. Oh,

let it not be so for you and for me! Please be advised this morning, if we have placed our hope in any sort of unrighteousness, then our hope is a hopeless sham. It will never deliver what it promises and it will absolutely be destroyed in the end.

Listen to the warning offered in Psalm 146:3-4, which says, “*Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.*” And as Jesus said in the last passage we examined, “*People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars.*” Unrighteousness is completely unreliable, and unless we realize the veracity of that truth, we are destined for great heartache and much despair.

With that said, let us now glance at the other side of that presidential survey. That is, let us flip the question around and ask for the names of the two or three presidents in all of American history who have demonstrated the *most* integrity. Whom would we name then? This too would be a fascinating conversation. However, I do not think it would take nearly as long. In fact, I imagine that we would come to a consensus on the first two almost instantly. Surely we would all agree that both George Washington and Abraham Lincoln belong at or near the top of this list.

And the point of this survey is exactly the inverse of the last. The point here is that, while unrighteousness always fails in the end, righteousness, on the other hand, is reliable. What we discover in the effectiveness of Washington and Lincoln is exactly what the Bible would expect us to discover. Because in both places, we see that the chief characteristic of a good leader is righteousness.

The Bible highlights this truth in many places, but none more compellingly than in Titus 1 and in 1 Timothy 3, where Paul sets forth, in no uncertain terms, the necessary qualifications for anyone who would lead in the church. And of the 18 characteristics of a good leader listed in the first chapter of Titus, no less than 16 of them deal with personal righteousness. Effective faith knows that only righteousness is reliable.

In our verses for this morning, we see that the tremendous faith of the Centurion was first of all a reliance upon righteousness. Look with me at our text, beginning in verse six, where the Centurion sent his friend to say, “*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.*” Here, we see that the Centurion clearly knew that he was relying upon righteousness, but not upon just any

righteousness. No, he was placing his faith in perfect righteousness. This Centurion was trusting in a Man so completely righteous that he felt unworthy even to enter into His presence. As He placed his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, he was relying on the very embodiment of righteousness.

And as Jesus commends this Centurion's faith, this attitude is a large part of the reason why, because effective faith, you see, is rooted in that kind of humility. It understands that God is righteous and that I am not. It recognizes that we sinful people do not *deserve* anything, but rather is grounded in grace. 2 Timothy 1:9 makes this point obvious, saying, "*It is God who saved us and chose us to live a holy life. He did this not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan long before the world began—to show his love and kindness to us through Christ Jesus.*"

Effective faith rightly understands that human prayers and requests are the desires of unworthy people expressed to a God who is infinitely worthy. Therefore, effective faith trusts not in our own ability to earn good gifts from our Father in Heaven, but, rather, upon His benevolent desire to give us all that we really need, and often a whole lot more. Jesus makes this very point Himself in Matthew 7:9-11, where He asks, "*Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*"

And, of course, no truth emphasizes God's desire to give us good gifts more than the cross of Christ. Romans 5:8 says it best, "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" Only Jesus Christ lived the perfectly righteous life that we cannot live, and, therefore, only He is righteous enough to pay the penalty for our sins. Hear that: No other righteousness will do; no other sacrifice will suffice. No other life has ever or will ever be able to satisfy the standards of holiness. Therefore, if our sins are not forgiven in Christ, then they are not forgiven at all. Only righteousness is reliable, and only Jesus Christ is perfectly righteous. Therefore, He is the only object worthy of our trust, and praise God that we can radically rely on the radical righteousness of our radical Lord who died for us.

We can rely on the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Not only so, but we also see in our text that...

2.) We can rely upon the radical rule of Christ.

Let me introduce this point with a story about former Governor Christian Herter, who governed the state of Massachusetts in the mid 1960's.

During Christian Herter's first term in office, he was embroiled in a busy campaign for a second term in office. Late one afternoon, after a demanding day spent chasing votes and skipping lunch, Herter arrived at a church barbecue, and he was famished. As he moved down the serving line, he held out his plate to the woman serving chicken. She put a piece on his plate and turned to the next person in line.

"Excuse me," Governor Herter said, "Do you mind if I have another piece of chicken?"

"Sorry," the woman told him, "I'm only supposed to give one piece of chicken to each person."

"But I'm starved," the governor said.

"Sorry," the woman said again. "Only one to a customer!"

Although Governor Herter was usually a modest and unassuming man, he decided that this time he would throw his weight around a little.

"Do you know who I am?" he said, "I am the governor of this state!"

"Do you know who I am?" the woman said, "I'm the lady in charge of the chicken! Move along, mister."

Apparently, whatever the chicken lady says goes! Once the chicken lady has spoken, all discussion is done. Don't even try to debate or argue or complain, because she is the lunch line authority. (You know, having seen Ida Lue on the frontlines of fellowship meals, I believe it.)

This is, of course, a goofy story, but it does highlight an important truth from our text, that actually has nothing at all to do with chicken, but it has everything to do with authority. And the point is simple. What might be true about the chicken lady at the church social is absolutely and infinitely true of Jesus Christ everywhere and all the time. What Jesus says goes. In other words, our Lord is perfect in His authority. Our Lord possesses all power to perform any good work...in any place...at any time...and for anyone at all...period. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus says as much, declaring, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,*" and in Ephesians 1:20-23, we read this potent passage:

*“[God the Father] raised [Christ] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”*

Jesus is perfect in power, and we see His matchless authority on obvious display in our verses this morning. Look with me, if you will, at the end of verse seven and continuing through the ninth verse. There we hear the Centurion saying, *“But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 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.”* 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.”*

Simply put, the Centurion’s faith was so extraordinary because he understood the extraordinary authority of Jesus Christ. While Luke’s Gospel has told us about the crowds of others who were constantly clamoring to get the sick and dying directly in His presence, this Roman official realized that Jesus’ power to heal was far superior to other people’s puny perceptions. He knew what we are blessed to understand, and that is this: There is no good thing too difficult for Jesus to do, nor is there any problem too tough for Him to tackle. This Centurion was commended for his faith because he expressed what we are blessed to confess—that Jesus is Lord of all, and that He is, as [Ephesians 3:20](#) asserts, *“able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.”*

Although He sometimes says “no,” we should always be aware that Jesus Christ has the power to fulfill every righteous desire of our hearts. Let me ask you: What godly desires do you have today? Are you taking those requests to God’s throne of grace, or do you keep hoping for help from a lesser authority? Against all odds, this Centurion desperately longed for his servant to be made well, and Jesus only needed to say “yes” to his request for him to catch a glimpse of God’s best. But here is the key: This incredible blessing probably never would have happened if the Centurion had not sought the right source and made his request. Sadly, many good and godly desires will go unanswered simply because people never take the time to ask the only One with the authority to respond.

Would you seek Him out today and tell Him the desires of your heart? You will be blessed if you do, because we can absolutely rely in the radical rule and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Finally...

3.) We can rely upon the radical redemption of Christ.

I am beginning to wax a bit long here, so let me make this point as succinctly as I can. It boils down to this: Whether we care to admit it or not, our problem is far bigger than our powers. Our darkest dilemma is far deeper than our dominion. In each of our lives there exists a need beyond human knowledge and a condition beyond human cure. Succinctly stated, we simply cannot bring about the redemption we most require by ourselves.

And in this truth see a large part of the reason why the Centurion's faith was so lauded by Jesus. His faith was so great because His pride was so small. His reliance upon Christ was so remarkable because He understood the vast difference between human weakness and divine strength. Even though this Centurion was a very powerful man in his society, he nonetheless knew that he was utterly helpless in the face of his servant's debilitating disease. This sickness was far stronger than his strength. Not only so, but the restoration his servant required was too desperate for *any* of the remedies of man. So, in faith, he looked for help from the radically righteous rule of Jesus Christ.

No one else could possibly help; nothing else could possibly be done. The sickness was dire and the patient was dying. It was Jesus or nothing, and Jesus came through. What might have seemed undoable was doable for Him. As Jesus Himself says in Luke 18:27, "*What [was] impossible with men [was] possible with God.*" And in the next few verses, as Jesus raises the widow's son, He shows us just how radical the nature of His redemption really is. It is unrivaled, unmitigated, unparalleled, and unstoppable. In these events is revealed a rescue more remarkable than human ingenuity and a restoration more resplendent than the whole scope of human science. In these historical truths about our Lord, we witness the radical redemption of our Lord, and no power in all of Creation can compare.

The last thing I want you to realize about this passage this morning is this: Apart from Jesus Christ, you and I are that dying servant. Without Him we are deathly sick with sin and separated from the only cure. And when we find ourselves in such a state, there is nowhere else to go. There is one, and only one, place to turn. There is only One on whom we can rely. Would we turn to Jesus

Christ today? Only in His righteousness can our unrighteousness be redeemed. Only in His rule will we find the power to be healed. And only in His redemption can we truly be redeemed.

Will we trust in Him today? We can rely on His perfect righteousness. We can rely on His perfect rule. And we can rely on the perfect redemption He died to purchase for all who will believe.