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The Faith Of A Soldier

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Luke vii. 9b. "I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel."

There are few matters of deeper concern to us today than the faith of our soldiers. On their faith depends the preservation of liberties, more precious to us than life. And as the issues and titanic nature of this struggle become clearer, it is evident that while a student in arms may have sufficed for the first, a believer under arms is needed for this World War.

I well remember the swan song of one of our loved legionnaires, Steve Banan. The night before he passed away he told us how discouraged he had become, as a rookie, trying to learn the military maneuvers and how an older officer had steadied his wavering faith by a word of encouragement. That word of help restored the morale of a soldier who, later, stood nobly for us at Chateau-Thierry. In the North Carolina Monument at Gettysburg, Borglum has carved the figure of another rookie, who has been terrified at his first baptism of fire. But an older buddy has his arm over the lad's shoulder to steady him, and another companion is holding the colors before his face while a falling officer is calling him to go forward. Who knows what kind word or helpful act may be just the needed stimulus that will confirm a soldier's determination to make that final heroic effort, which stands between defeat and victory for him, between freedom and slavery for us.

One of the most moving stories in Holy Writ is the record of how Jonothan, the King's son, went out into the wilderness and strengthened David's hand in God. When Amaleck attacked Israel, God commanded Joshua to take the men of battle and fight Amaleck, and Moses, Aaron and Hur to go up into the mountain and pray. While our soldiers are fighting Amaleck, it certainly becomes those of us, who are at home, to gather in our accustomed places of worship and pray that the hands of our soldiers and sailors and marines may be strengthened in the Lord God of hosts.

As important as is this matter of encouraging the faith of a soldier, this is not the message of our text. It is not suggested in this passage that we have such a noble faith that we can lend some of it to our soldier friends, but rather, Jesus has chosen a Roman soldier, as a believer whose faith He underlines for universal imitation. "Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel." Instead of our lending our faith to this soldier, it is rather that we are to borrow his, to compare our faith with his and so determine whether we have the real Christian faith. Our Lord paid a great tribute to John the Baptist, but He did not portray John's faith for universal imitation; for John doubted. He appreciated the fine loyalty of the disciples, but neither were they selected as examples of great faith, for they were slow of heart to believe.

The faith which our Lord held up for universal imitation was the faith of this Roman centurion. A generation later Paul so manifested Christ to

the praetorium guard that they of Caesar's household sent Christian salutations. And a century thereafter brings the story of the Thundering Legion when God heard the prayers of Christian soldiers and saved an imperial army from defeat. So, through the centuries, there have been soldiers of great faith. When Woodrow Wilson came to unveil a portrait of that great Christian soldier, Stonewall Jackson, he said, "I do not understand how any man can approach the discharge of the duties of life without faith in Jesus Christ." General Sir. W. G. S. Dobbie, who held Malta against over two thousand air attacks, bears this testimony to the saving and keeping power of God in Christ: "I came to know Him as my Saviour 47 years ago, and all through my military service to the present day He has been my Saviour and Lord. Although I have often and often been unfaithful to Him, yet He has never been unfaithful to me, nor has He let me down. I have always been sensible of the fact that my sins which were forgiven me when I first accepted Him as my Saviour, were blotted out once for all, and that in spite of my failure I have become a new creature in Christ Jesus . . . To serve God and to follow Him is a very real and practical thing in the army."

1. The greatness of the centurion's faith lay, in the first place, in its exceptional response to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. The Word became flesh for us men and for our salvation. God manifest Himself in the flesh that the light of the knowledge of His glory might shine for us in the face of Jesus Christ. If we could have climbed up to God by mysticism or speculation or some other way, God would never have come down to us. He did come down to us, thus teaching us that all the eyes of our faith must focus on Christ. "Earth with her thousand voices praises God." But "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ." When the heart is quickened by the Holy Spirit, the eye of faith turns to the Lord Jesus Christ as certainly as the compass needle turns to the magnetic North. The faith of this soldier focused on God in His saving ministry, on God in Christ. To the Centurion Jesus was Divine Lord and Saviour.

"The nucleus of faith resides in a religious relation to Jesus as Revealer of God." In the presence of the Lord Jesus the ultimate Dimension—God—so dawned upon his soul that the centurion cried, "Unworthy". The community said he was worthy. No doubt he was worthy, compared with his fellow citizens. But when he faced Jesus He said, I am not worthy to come into Thy presence, I am not worthy that Thou should come under my roof. And Jesus, far from rebuking this attitude, commended it.

At the Baptism John declared himself unworthy to loosen Jesus' shoes. At the miraculous draught of fishes Peter said, "Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man". Awed by his holiness the thief on the Cross admitted that he, the malefactor, was receiving the due reward of his deeds. So the introduction of men to Christ is ever ac-

accompanied by a sense of unworthiness. Our sense of defect is the creation of the Christ, the rebuke of the Infinite Holiness. The consciousness of sin that fills our Western civilization, that is deepest in such noble spirits as Paul, Augustine, Luther and Edwards, is but the stern report of the immeasurable moral contrast that our Lord presents to the world at its best.

"The moon at its full is but a hemisphere of light, the obverse side is a hemisphere of darkness." Men standing in the splendor of Christ's character look radiant, but that hemisphere of their lives shines in a light reflected from Him. And there is always the other side, those sections of our lives that are turned away from Him, "the vast obverse of our humanity that rolls on in Christless gloom."

Come to Gethsemane. The Master is praying until He sweats, as it were, great drops of blood, and yet His three chosen disciples are unable to watch with Him one hour. The light from the Lord filled His best followers with the horror of the great darkness in which their lives moved, and this sense of corruption deepened with the progress of the years so that to the last they were distressed with the defects that Christ's character inevitably discovered. It is Paul the aged who cries, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief." It seemed to John G. Paton, the great missionary to the New Hebrides that he grew worse the first ten years of His Christian life. Living with Christ simply revealed more and more clearly the shadow of his own moral failures. When I was a guest in the home of Principal Macleod he told me of the radiant faith of his pious wife. Yet this good Scottish woman came to die she spoke of herself as leprous all through waiting the touch of the Great Physician. Blessed be God, the same precious Saviour who convicts us of sin, says, "Son", "Daughter", "be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee."

II. The Greatness of the Centurion's Faith showed itself in his exceptional spiritual insight into our Lord's place in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Centurion appreciated the military chain of command. He was under authority to his military superiors, he exercised authority over the soldiers in his command, saying to one come, and to another go. He saw in Jesus the Lord, the anointed King, whose Word on earth was also with authority.

"No one who has honestly faced the fact of Christ can doubt that the Throne is His by right. It has been bought with a price—bought with the hunger in the desert when He would not make the stones into bread; bought with the tears He shed over the sins of men; bought with the sweat of Gethsemane which was like great drops of blood; bought with the bitter Cross where they broke His body in death; bought with the deathless love which through all the years has resolutely refused to let the lost world go. The Captain of the hosts of humanity has Himself been in the ranks. He has experienced the hardship and peril of life's campaign from the common soldier's side of it. He has endured the discipline. If He rides at the head of the hosts today, it is because He once walked on foot. If one day He is to be King over all the sons of men, it is because at the first He was not ashamed to call us Brethren." Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name.

Sin began when Eve questioned God's Holy Word. And saving faith began when Abraham believed God's Word and it was reckoned unto Him for righteousness. The fine thing about this soldier was that he simply asked a Word from Jesus. Lord, it is not necessary that Thou come under my roof. Only speak with a Word and my servant shall be made well. He seems to have had before his mind the figure of a military movement with the preparatory command ringing across the parade ground, sounded by the commanding officer and taken up by majors, captains, lieutenants and sergeants. Then with the word of execution the whole movement is carried out in precise order. The man at the furthest end of the field moves with the same precision as the closest soldier.

The Word of the Lord Jesus Christ is effective in healing the servant, even though that word is spoken at a distance. Some years ago, Theodore McAllister, an elder in the Gettysburg Presbyterian Church told me his experience in the Confederate War. As a member of Cole's Maryland Cavalry this Yankee soldier was wounded and carried a prisoner to Andersonville, Georgia. Fever set in and one night the doctors gave him up as hopeless. But the next day, to their surprise, he was greatly improved. When the war was over and the prisoner returned to his home, he told the incident to his sisters. They immediately got out the calendar, and checking the time, said, "That was the night our Mother walked the floor all night praying for you." A Mother praying up near the Mason-Dixon Line and the Lord Christ putting on the healing staunch in Andersonville, Ga. When I told that story in Augusta, one of the members came up and told me of an elder there who had prayed it through for his son who was a doctor on Bataan. Prayed until the Lord Christ spoke peace to His anxious heart.

Whether they are on Bataan, or Australia, or Ireland or the high seas, we can and should pray, and the Lord Christ can and will hear our prayers, and keep them in the hollow of His hand whether that keeping be for time or for eternity. No I did not say they would all return, but that He would hear our prayers for each and for every one.

III. The Centurion's faith generated in him a great moral sensitiveness. In days before our story begins the Holy Spirit had enabled him to see the light of God that shone in Judaism, so that he built for the Jews their magnificent synagogue. When Jesus began His ministry of mercy, the Centurion was attracted to Him, learned to trust His power even exercised at a distance and to share some of the Saviour's concern for the suffering. Thus we find an officer who has a deep interest in his servant. The servant was dear unto him, so dear that he sent supplications to Jesus for His healing. One of the fine things about a great soldier is his appreciation of the men who serve under him. One of the clearest evidences of true Christian faith is appreciation of those who stand, for one reason or another, on a lower level of life, whether it be a child, a servant, or a neighbor who has less wealth or prestige or position. A moral sensitiveness generated by Christ inspired Florence Nightingale and the Red Cross. That same moral sensitiveness calls, today, for support of the many agencies ministering to the needs of the soldier. Interest in a weaker brother showed the dawning of the true Christian spirit in the story of Scrooge and Bob Cratchit. Brother Gideon, the pastor of our largest

colored Presbyterian Church, has an original way of putting the Golden Rule, "Be good to the other fellow when you are going up, that he may be good to you when you are coming down." The greatness of the Centurion's faith showed itself in a moral sensitiveness to the needs of his weaker brother.

IV. Finally, this great faith was an exceptional example of simple childlike trust. In the arms of his faith the Centurion simply brought his desperately sick servant to Jesus and left him there. He looked so wholly to Jesus power that he saw no difficulty in the hardest case. He looked so wholly to Jesus' will as not to think of the means by which Jesus willed it. He looked so wholly to Jesus's glory that no thought of self could steal in. Faith is looking to Jesus with all the eyes of the soul. Faith is coming to Jesus with all the impetus of the soul. Faith is committing oneself, one's soul, one's loved child to Jesus without reservation. We bring our children to God when they are babies carrying them in the arms of our faith. Whether or not you brought that soldier lad of yours to God as a baby, will you not bring Him to God now in the arms of your faith and on the wings of your prayer? Commit him without reservation to your loving Saviour, ask Him to be that boy's Saviour and Lord and Friend and all-sufficient God?

As the Centurion saw Jesus move toward his home his faith grew stronger. We are saved if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm to the end. Christian faith is attested by its steadfastness under trial, its continuance in well-doing. The early Christians carried the report of the things concerning Jesus and gathered believers into a joyous faith in Him as their Divine Lord. Then as time, and trouble and persecution came, these reports were written into Gospels, Mark's first principles of catechism of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and then Luke's ampler Gospel to confirm Theophilus in the things in which he had already been catechised. Now the thing that the memoirs of the apostles magnified was just the story of Jesus' sufferings. That formed a kind of barrage thrown behind the believers to keep them from turning back. During the First World War a barrage of artillery shells was generally thrown in front of the advancing infantry to clear the way, but occasionally a barrage would be thrown behind them. In such a case it might be death to go on, but it was certainly death and dishonour to turn back. To the early Christians the passion of the Lord was just such a barrage. To turn back means crucifying unto ourselves the Son of God afresh. It may be hard to go onward in our Christian faith, in the serious days ahead, but we dare not turn back. Like the Christian martyrs of old, let us also endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Let us hold fast our confession firm to the end. Let us fight the good fight. Let us keep the faith of a soldier. Amen.

Souls are not saved by "systems" but by the Spirit of God. Organizations without the Holy Spirit are like mills without power. Methods and plans without the Grace of God are pipes without water, lamps without oil, banks without money. Even a church that has an orthodox creed and accepts the Biblical standards is as useless as are clouds without rain until Power comes from God.

—Charles H. Spurgeon.

A 'VOICE'

"Tomorrow," he faithfully promised, "tomorrow for revival I'll pray;
Tomorrow I'll plead as I ought to, I'm busy, too busy, today!
Tomorrow I'll spend in my closet, tomorrow I will humbly bow."
Yet ever a "voice" kept whispering, "**But the church is languishing now!!**"
Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow—the delay e'er repeated went on;
Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow—till the years and the "voice" were gone?
Till the Church its God had forgotten? Till the land was covered with sin?
Till millions had hopelessly perished, and eternity was ushered in?
O members of the body of Christ, O ye Church of the living God,
O editors and leaders and pastors, O saints where our fathers trod;
The "voice" still insistently whispers; answer not, "Tomorrow I'll pray."
The Voice is one of authority; **the church needs reviving today!**
Pray, O Pray, for Revival!
Great Commission Prayer League.

Oklahoma Presbyterian College

Judge A. H. Ferguson
Chairman Board Of Trustees
Durant, Oklahoma

After ten years of faithful service Major and Mrs. Bramlett tendered their resignations as President and Dean of the Oklahoma Presbyterian College at the close of the school year, June 1, 1942.

Major and Mrs. Bramlett came to the College in 1932, when a particular service was needed. During the period of their administration the accumulated indebtedness on the institution was removed, the buildings were reconditioned throughout, and the affiliation with Southeastern State College was also effected, whereby the students enrolled at Oklahoma Presbyterian College can also receive diplomas from this state institution.

Having completed the service that has been requested of them, Major and Mrs. Bramlett feel that they should give way to a new leadership for the enlarged educational program which the Board of Trustees has outlined for this missionary institution, which had its beginning a half a century ago in an Indian day school, which through the years has sought to serve the Indian young people of our Church.

Miss Edith F. Hodgson of Athens, Georgia, who for several years has been a member of the Oklahoma Presbyterian College faculty as teacher of Bible and student counselor, has been appointed school Principal until a president can be secured. Miss Hodgson is a graduate of the University of Georgia and of the Biblical Seminary in New York. She is a devoted Christian leader and intensely interested in the home mission work of our Assembly. She will be assisted in the administration of the College this year by other members of the faculty.

The announcement of this change in the administration of Oklahoma Presbyterian College will be of particular interest to the friends of the institution throughout the Assembly who have so loyally supported the College in its effort to serve the Indian young people of Oklahoma.