

THE SOLDIER . . . who conquered his enemies without fighting  
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(Luke 7: 1-10)

This Gentile soldier of a bygone age has won the admiration of the world. His restraint in face of provocation; his dignity in spite of insult and enmity; his forbearance and tolerance when open aggression might have been excusable, gained for him the respect of those whose land he had come to dominate. He was a man of outstanding quality.

#### Kindness Overcoming Hatred

Racial pride was a supreme characteristic in Israel, and patriotic Jews found it extremely difficult to beg from the Carpenter of Nazareth. The elders of the synagogues constantly urged their followers to boycott the meetings of Christ, and it was a startling sight when these same elders came to seek the Master's help. "And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue." Their testimony gave eloquent evidence of the power of human kindness. All their bitter resentment and passionate opposition had been challenged and overcome by the kindness of this Roman. The sunlight of his gracious personality had opened the flowers of appreciation which had been fast closed in their night of bitterness. They put aside their prejudice; swallowed their pride, and on behalf of their Gentile friend sought the help of the Saviour.

#### Humility Overcoming Pride

The man for whom they sought assistance was a centurion—a captain in Caesar's army of occupation. He was no ordinary man, and his qualities had been recognized by his superiors. His promotion to higher rank had not spoiled him, and when necessity arose, he was not above seeking the help of a humble Carpenter whose exploits had aroused the enmity of many of his friends. Finally, he openly confessed his unworthiness of the approach of Christ, and said his home was no fit place for the Son of God. Humility is a flower which blooms in the garden of graciousness. In some climes it is very rare orchid.

#### Faith Overcoming Doubt

"Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof . . . say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." The officer saw Caesar's kingdom and recognized that the weight of his own commands was only explained by the authority he represented. He saw also a greater empire in which Jesus of Nazareth held high office. The Teacher represented eternal powers, and unseen angelic servants were waiting to fulfil His desires.

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"Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed."  
Real faith sees the invisible; laughs at the impossible, and  
cries aloud in thanksgiving even before the deed is  
accomplished.

#### Grace Overcoming Need

"And they that were sent, returning to the house, found  
the servant whole that had been sick." It would appear  
from Matthew's account of the same story that as a last  
desperate measure, the captain himself had gone out to  
the roadway to voice his humble protest against the un-  
worthiness of his own abode. Thus the Lord was able  
to say to him, "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed,  
so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed  
in the selfsame hour" (Matt. 8:13). This ancient story  
is rich in truth. (i) The centurion was one of the best  
people of his day, yet he still had need of Christ. (ii) The  
grace of God as manifest in Christ was both able and  
willing to respond to the appeal for help. (iii) The Lord  
Jesus is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever."  
Therefore I can follow the example of the centurion,  
remembering that what might be lacking in my faith, will  
be more than supplied by the kindness of God.

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