

“BATTLE OF WILL”

The sovereignty of God

LUKE 7:1-17

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by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Luke 7:1-17 Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to

him, was sick and ready to die. So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, "for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue." 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. "Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. "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." 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!" And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick. Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd. And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother. Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has risen up among us"; and, "God has visited His people." And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region.

(From "The Sovereignty of God: Introduction, by John W. Ritenbaugh, Forerunner, "Personal," September-October 1999)
In the late 1950s, I was introduced to God's sovereignty when someone gave me a small book, *Your [God](#) is Too Small*, by J. B. Philips, author of the Philips paraphrase of the New Testament. He draws his theme from conversations with many people whose concepts of God were so limited that he felt it was no wonder they had little or no faith. At best, he concludes, many seem to think of God as nothing more than a greater man; an angry judge; a soft and kindly grandfather; or a scientist who invented the universe, wound it up and walked away from it, unconcerned as it operated on its own.

How does our idea of God compare with these? Do we also think of God in some of these terms, however modified by our experiences in the church of God?

Is the God we worship almighty in authority over everything? Does He shape the history of nations? Does He place and displace the rulers of the mighty and not-so-mighty nations? Is He truly as involved in life's details as Psalm 139 indicates David perceived Him? And what about the sufferings of mankind? Where does our God fit into this tragic part of life? If God is truly sovereign, He is involved—deeply involved—in all these areas.

The centurion in our story did not approach Jesus with the self-entitled attitude so prevalent in modern day Christendom: the “where’s mine?” modus operandi that so many of us who claim righteous standing still exude whenever we don’t get our way or things don’t happen as we had envisioned. Even those of us who rightfully reject the prosperity doctrine of the “name-it-and-claim-it” folks still are so often found guilty of quiet back-alley attempts at strong-arming God. Never mind that such in reality appears to be a schoolyard attempt by a couple of 5th graders attempting to extort another kid’s lunch money. The truth is, we are still so often operating within the realm of belief that we somehow *deserve* wellness, constant happiness, and the “good-things” to happen to us, even if those “good things” are measured only by the yardstick of the secular world. We’re Christians after all! We’re *special!*

Yet this man approached Jesus in a much different way and with a much different heart. And because he did, something happened in this story that is very rare in the gospel accounts: *Jesus issued a clear commendation to an individual.* And let’s face it...that didn’t happen too often! Why should it? Both then and now we clearly tend toward behavior more akin to spoiled three-year-olds than the “good soldiers” of 2 Timothy 2! And instead of getting the cookie we are demanding before dinner, we often just end up losing our TV privileges. For there is a very real truth that is so very prevalent within our faith relationships, and that is the fact of discipline. Like children, God is “training us up in the way that we should go.” And despite what we think, God is going to always do what is best and what is right according to His plan for us.

Of course, it is at that juncture that many of us attempt to “run away from home.” *I don’t need this! I don’t have to take that! I’m my own man! I’m just going to strike out on my own!*” Ya...well, *OK!* Despite His unequivocal love and timeless Fatherly heart, He will simply show you to the door. No one is captive...not with God or this church. But what happens next is legendary. All sorts of sordid events that most of us would soon like to forget...assuming we made it back home again that is. And through it all there was some universal epiphanies for all of us who tantrum’ed our way out the door: *we’re not special, and we’re not deserving, and we’re NOT the boss.* And in the end what we learned was that God has a very specific and idyllic plan for each of us, and we will never strong arm God into changing His mind. WE must change OURS or be relegated to “plan B”...not His design at all, but one in which He will continue to love you through and try to hold your head above the water as you flail about trying not to drown. But hear this: ***He will never acquiesce.***

We must forever and yet still *every single day too*, decide whether we want what we want or whether we want what **God** wants for us! Some folks fight the fight for *years* only to finally buckle out of impatience and emotional and fleshly desires. But we need to understand, *it all only counts if you finish the race.* Paul spoke of such in Acts 20:24 *“But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish (A): **my race** with joy, and (B) the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, (WHY?)...to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”* “**MY** race...the one that is individually ordained to be lived out by me...and the ministry **WHICH I RECEIVED FROM THE LORD JESUS...**” Not the “ever fluid personally designed future that I have created to make me happy and give me ultimate happiness.” But rather the one that **God** gave you...before the foundations of the earth were laid... *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you”* He says in Jeremiah 1:5 *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, (thoughts) to give you a future and a hope.”* Jeremiah 29:11

Ps 33:10 The LORD brings the counsel of the nations **to nothing**; He makes the plans of the peoples **of no effect**.

Ps 33:11 The counsel of the LORD **stands forever**, The plans of His heart to all generations.

Here was a man who apparently understood all of this. He was not a Jew, but rather likely a proselyte foreigner...a “gentile,”...and “outsider.” But yet He seemingly grasped the situation for what it was. Maybe someone taught him well. Maybe he just uniquely understood that this “man” Jesus, was...*well*, “holding all the cards!” But his actions said it all. His dealings with Jesus spoke volumes as to how he understood Jesus and how he understood his own place in the universe. It was a total humble surrender to the authority that Christ bore. I guess you could say that this centurion “got it.” He didn’t presume. He didn’t demand. He just asked, and he asked in faith. And he was ready for whatever the answer might be.

It seemed that the centurion was both a man of means and a man with some social clout. Those who came to Jesus for this man spoke highly of him. But such a worldly standing didn’t mean anything to this man when measured by the yardstick of the God in flesh! And Jesus wasn’t known for degrading mankind, but clearly He understood the difference too. It was just simply a fact! The difference...the *distance*, between Creator and creation was and is *huge*. Sometimes I need to stand in my yard at night and look up to be reminded of just how great that difference is, and thus be reminded of how far He came...how far He lowered Himself to become a man and walk amongst us and die a human death.

Here is another trap for us today: it seems we cannot resist the temptation of seeing faith as “the little engine that could.” ...to see such as an “adamant belief and stance”...sometimes a “mind-over-matter” belief, that God is going to give us what we ask for. But faith is never my whipped up frenzy of mental fortitude that staunchly holds to the “gimme-what-I-ask-for” demands toward God. 1Jo 5:14 promises us that “... *this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*” So any attempt to throw down with God, or any sniffing beggary that remains yet outside His will for us will still be met with a Fatherly “no.”

Now we know that scripture tells us that often we fail to receive from God because we fail to ask. So there is no crime and no foul in asking! But how are we on receiving a “no” or a “wait?” Sadly, we often can really mess up that wonderful plan God has set for us, not because He said *NO*, but because we refused to wait for His timing in delivery of His ‘yes’! See...we not only want what we want, but we want it right now! The yes could be great cookies but take them out of the oven before they are sufficiently baked and we ruin them.

The centurion understood just what authority was and what it meant. He knew the level of that authority by remarking that Jesus could exercise his authority anywhere. The centurion knew what it is to be both *under authority* and to still be able to issue commands like “*Go,*” “*Come*” and “*Do this.*” If such authority works for a soldier, surely it works for Jesus. The text then records something found only here concerning the reaction of Jesus. It says He “marveled”...or he “was amazed.” Now I can’t say I have ever done anything that “amazed” Jesus unless we count maybe amazed at my stupidity! Therefore I think it is a safe thing to say that this is a faith that should be emulated. Here is trust, confidence, rest in the authority of God and a peace in God’s decisions and actions. Grasping that Jesus was calling the shots, the centurion committed the well-being of his beloved slave into Jesus’ hands. Jesus commended the centurion’s humility and his understanding of Jesus’ authority: that kind of faith is **exemplary!**

The story line moves on to a small place outside of Nazareth...the village Nain. Here Jesus again exercised His authority and power, but with a noted difference: *He was not asked to do so by anyone on the earthly level.* My point in noting such is that the plan that Jesus ultimately has for us is never contingent upon us. That is not to say that our participation in such is not critical, or in some way taking a fatalistic hyper-Calvinistic stance where prayer is pointless. God *loves* to hear from us! He wants to work *with* us, not against us or despite us! But frankly, the bottom line is that Jesus has already written the book called Tim Dodson. Mine is to read, listen, hear, and obey.

The instructional prayer holds “*thy will be done,*” never “*my will be done!*” Jesus simply did this miracle because He was the authority. Jesus doesn’t have to explain himself! Once in Mark chapter 11 some of the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to Him and said “*By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority to do these things?*” And Jesus just didn’t tell them... He didn’t explain Himself. And I will be honest with you, in my world Jesus seldom if ever explains Himself.

Recently my wife Sharon had a conversation with a man in the exercise of her nursing job. The man had various health issues that were being dealt with...some which most of us would deem fairly intense. But sometime back he was in a far worse state. He verbally recalled tragic and painful events that had transpired in his life, and finally his health crisis led to him being in a coma. The man spoke now with a passion and a gleam about how when he was in that coma he had had a meeting with Jesus. And Jesus told him something that in his words forever changed the remainder of his life as well as how he sees his past. He told Sharon that Jesus told him that “everything that had happened in his life, was to bring him to that point...to that place.” And when he came out of that coma, everything was different. HE was different! The fight was gone. The struggle was over. He had found his peace, and his peace was not just IN Jesus, but *in His authority*. Jesus had it handled...

Notice that back in verse 9 Jesus commented that, “not even in Israel have I found such great faith.” The word “found” implies that the Lord was and no doubt still *is* looking for that kind of faith! In our humanity, we tend to think that God uses people with great and manifested gifting. But what we need to see is that even more important than giftedness, the Lord will use a person who simply trusts in Him. He is looking for men and women of faith. Men and women who recognize His authority as well as His love and grace.

I think a lot of folks today are fighting Jesus on the aspect of His authority. We tend to operate within a false realm of entitlement which seeks for Jesus to *do for us* rather than living in the incredible light of what He *did for us already*. We see Jesus as a genie in a bottle and we spend our time seeking his favorable action on our part rather than living in awe and humility that He died to save us from ourselves and from the guilt of sin, and arose on the third day to destroy death in His glory and authority that we might live and live forever!

Most often this issue is a muddle of struggle in the nebulous land of “in-between.” We in theory want the will of Christ for our lives, but we want what we want too. And so the fight is on. And that’s where we tend to live out our lives. Lives of struggle and strife, a lack of the perfect peace that scripture describes and the absence of that “joy unspeakable and full of glory.”

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:6-9

So, ...*just who is really calling the shots with you? Whose will is in control?*

“Be still, and know that I am God...” Psalms 46:10